ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

SHAKESPEARE



MACMILLAN AND CO., Limited
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, Ltd.
TORONTO

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

SHAKESPEARE

BY

WALTER RALEIGH

FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, AND PROFESSOR OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1911

First Edition April 1907
Reprinted May 1907 (twice), 1909
1911

CONTENTS

SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE

Every age has its own difficulties in the appreciation of Shakespeare. The age in which he lived was too near to him to see him truly. From his contemporaries, and those rare and curious inquirers who collected the remnants of their talk, we learn that "his Plays took well"; and that he was "a handsome, well shaped man, very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit." The easy-going and casual critics who were privileged to know him in life regarded him chiefly as a successful member of his own class, a prosperous actor-dramatist, whose energy and skill were given to the business of the theatre and the amusement of the play-going public. There was no one to make an idol of him while he lived. The newly sprung class to which he belonged was despised and disliked by the majority of the decent burgesses of the City of London, and though the players found substantial favour at the hands of the Court, and were applauded and imitated by a large following of young law-students and fashionable gallants, yet this favour and support brought them none the nearer to social consideration or worshipful esteem. In the City they were enemies, "the caterpillars of a commonwealth"; at the Court they were servants, and service is no heritage. It was not until the appearance of

the Folio Edition of 1623, that Shakespeare's dramatic writings challenged the serious attention of "the great variety of readers." From that time onward, his fame steadily advanced to the conquest of the world. Ben Jonson in his verses prefixed to the Folio, though he makes the largest claims for his friend, yet invokes him first of all as the "Soul of the Age, the applause, delight, the wonder of our Stage." Milton, some nine years later, considers him simply as the author of a marvellous book. The readers of Shakespeare took over from the fickle players the trust and inheritance of his fame. An early example of purely literary imitation, by a close student of his works, may be seen in Sir John Suckling's plays, which are fuller of poetic than of dramatic reminiscence. While the Restoration theatre mangled and parodied the tragic masterpieces, a new generation of readers kept alive the knowledge and heightened the renown of the written word. Then followed two centuries of enormous study; editions, annotations, treatises, huddled one upon another's neck, until, in our own day, the plays have become the very standard and measure of poetry among all English-speaking peoples.

So Shakespeare has come to his own, as an English man of letters; he has been separated from his fellows, and recognised for what he is: perhaps the greatest poet of all time; one who has said more about humanity than any other writer, and has said it better; whose works are the study and admiration of divines and philosophers, of soldiers and statesmen, so that his continued vogue upon the stage is the smallest part of his immortality; who has touched many spirits finely to fine issues, and has been for three centuries a source of delight and understanding, of wisdom and consolation.

The mistakes which beset our modern criticism of Shakespeare are not likely to be the mistakes of carelessness and undervaluation. We can hardly even join in Ben Jonson's confession, and say that we honour his memory "on this side idolatry." We are idolaters of Shakespeare, born and bred. Our sin is not indifference, but superstition—which is another kind of ignorance. In all the realms of political democracy there is no equality like that which a poet exacts from his readers. He seeks for no convertites nor worshippers, but records his ideas and impressions of life and society in order that the reader may compare them with his own. If the impressions tally, sympathy is born. If not, the courteous reader will yet find matter for thought. The indispensable preliminary for judging and enjoying Shakespeare is not knowledge of his history, not even knowledge of his works, but knowledge of his theme, a wide acquaintance with human life and human passion as they are reflected in a sensitive and independent mind. The poets, and but few others, have approached him from the right point of view, with the requisite ease and sincerity There is no writer who has been so laden with the impertinences of prosaic enthusiasm and learned triviality. There is no book, except the Bible, which has been so misread, so misapplied, or made the subject of so many idle paradoxes and ingenuities The most careless and casual lines in his plays have been twisted and squeezed in the hope that they will yield some medicinal secret. His poetry has been cut into minute indigestible fragments, and used like wedding-cake, not to eat, but to dream upon. The greatest poet of the modern world is at this day widely believed to have been also the most irrelevant, and to have valued the golden casket of his verse chiefly as a hiding-place for the odds

and ends of personal gossip. These are the penalties to be paid by great poets when their works become fashionable.

Even wiser students of poetry have found it hard to keep their balance. Since the rise of Romantic criticism, the appreciation of Shakespeare has become a kind of auction, where the highest bidder, however extravagant, carries off the prize. To love and to be wise is not given to man; the poets themselves have run to wild extremes in their anxiety to find all Shakespeare in every part of him; so that it has come to be almost a mark of insensibility to consider his work rationally and historically as a whole. Infinite subtlety of purpose has been attributed to him in cases where he accepted a story as he found it, or half contemptuously threw in a few characters and speeches to suit the requirements of his Elizabethan audience. Coleridge, for example, finds it "a strong instance of the fineness of Shakespeare's insight into the nature of the passions, that Romeo is introduced already love-bewildered," doting on Rosaline. Yet the whole story of Romeo's passion for Rosaline is set forth in Arthur Brooke's poem, from which Shakespeare certainly drew the matter of his play. Again, the same great critic asserts that "the low soliloquy of the Porter" in *Macbeth* was "written for the mob by some other hand, perhaps with Shakespeare's consent"; and that "finding it take, he with the remaining ink of a pen otherwise employed, just interpolated the words — 'I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.' Of the rest not one syllable has the ever-present being of Shakespeare." That is to say, Coleridge does not like the Porter's speech,

so he denies it to Shakespeare. But one sentence in it is too good to lose, so Shakespeare must be at hand to write it. This is the very ecstasy of criticism, and sends us back to the cool and manly utterances of Dryden, Johnson, and Pope with a heightened sense of the value of moderation and candour.

There is something noble and true, after all, in these excesses of religious zeal. To judge Shakespeare it is necessary to include his thought in ours, and the mind instinctively recoils from the audacity of the attempt. On his characters we pass judgment freely; as we grow familiar with them, we seem to belong to their world, and to be ourselves the pawns, if not the creatures, of Shakespeare's genius. We are well content to share in this dream-life, which is so marvellously vital, so like the real world as we know it; and we are unwilling to be awakened. How should the dream judge the dreamer? By what insolent device can we raise ourselves to a point outside the orbed continent of Shakespeare's life-giving imagination? How shall we speak of his character, when the very traits of that character are themselves men and women? Almost all the Romantic critics have felt the difficulty; most of them have refused to face it, preferring to plunge themselves deeper under the spell of the enchantment, and to hug the dream. They have busied themselves ardently and curiously with Shakespeare's creatures, and have satisfied their feelings towards the creator by raising to him, from time to time, an impassioned hymn of praise.

Yet Shakespeare was a man, and a writer: there was no escape for him; when he wrote, it was himself that he related to paper, his own mind that he revealed. Some men write so ill that their true sel

are almost completely concealed beneath their ragged and incompetent speech. May it be said that others write so well, with so large and firm a grasp of men and things, that they pass beyond our ken on the other side? In one sense, perhaps, it may. There is much that we do not know about Shakespeare, and it includes almost all that in our daily traffic with our fellows we judge to be significant, characteristic, illuminative. We know so little one of another, that we are thankful for the doubtful information given by thumb-marks and finger-prints, tricks of gesture, and accidental flaws in the clay. It is often by our littlenesses that we are most familiarly known; and here our knowledge of Shakespeare fails us. What we do know of him is so essential that it seems impersonal. All this detective machinery he has made of no account by opening his mind and heart to us. If we desire to know how he wore his hat, or what were his idiosyncrasies of speech, it is chiefly because we feel that these things might be of value as signs and indications. But a lifetime of such observations and inferences could not tell us one-tenth part of what he has himself revealed to us by the more potent and expressive way of language. If we knew his littlenesses we should be none the wiser: they would lie to us, and dwarf him. He has freed us from the deceits of these makeshifts; and those who feel that their knowledge of Shakespeare must needs depend chiefly on the salvage of broken facts and details, are his flunkeys, not his friends. "Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats with 'em?" It would be pleasant, no doubt, to unbend the mind in Shakespeare's company; to exchange the white-heat of the smithy for the lazy ease of the village-green; to see him put off his magic garment, and

fall back into the dear inanities of ordinary idle conversation. This pleasure is denied to us. But to know him as the greatest of artisans, when he collects his might and stands dilated, his imagination aflame, the thick-coming thoughts and fancies shaping themselves, under the stress of the central will, into a thing of life—this is to know him better, not worse. The rapid, alert reading of one of the great plays brings us nearer to the heart of Shakespeare than all the faithful and laudable business of the antiquary and the commentator.

But here we are met by an objection which is strong in popular favour and has received some measure of scholarly support. It is denied that we can find the man Shakespeare in his plays. He is a dramatic poet; and poetry, the clown says, is feigning. His enormously rich creative faculty has given us a long procession of fictitious persons who are as real to us as our neighbours; a large assembly, including the most diverse characters—Hamlet and Falstaff, Othello and Thersites, Imogen and Mrs. Quickly, Dogberry and Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Audrey—and in this crowd the dramatist conceals himself, and escapes. We cannot make him answerable for anything that he says. He is the fellow in the cellarage, who urges on the action of the play, but is himself invisible

It is a plausible objection, and a notable tribute to Shakespeare's success in producing the illusions which are the machinery of his art But it would never be entertained by an artist, and would have had short shrift from any of the company that assembled at the Mermaid Tavern. No man can walk abroad save on his own shadow. No dramatist can create live characters save by bequeathing the best of himself to the children of his art, scattering among them a largess

of his own qualities, giving, it may be, to one his wit, to another his philosophic doubt, to another his love of action, to another the simplicity and constancy that he finds deep in his own nature. There is no thrill of feeling communicated from the printed page but has first been alive in the mind of the author; there was nothing alive in his mind that was not intensely and sincerely felt. Plays like those of Shakespeare cannot be written in cold blood; they call forth the man's whole energies, and take toll of the last farthing of his wealth of sympathy and experience. In the plays we may learn what are the questions that interest Shakespeare most profoundly and recur to his mind with most insistence; we may note how he handles his story, what he rejects, and what he alters, changing its purport and fashion; how many points he is content to leave dark; what matters he chooses to decorate with the highest resources of his romantic art, and what he gives over to be the sport of triumphant ridicule; how in every type of character he emphasises what most appeals to his instinct and imagination, so that we see the meaning of character more plainly than it is to be seen in life. We share in the emotions that are aroused in him by certain situations and events; we are made to respond to the strange imaginative appeal of certain others; we know, more clearly than if we had heard it uttered, the verdict that he passes on certain characters and certain kinds of conduct. He has made us acquainted with all that he sees and all that he feels, he has spread out before us the scroll that contains his interpretation of the world;—how dare we complain that he has hidden himself from our knowledge?

The main cause of these difficulties is a misconception of the nature of poetry, and of the workings of a poet's

mind. Among readers of poetry there are men and women not a few who challenge a poet to deliver a short statement of his doctrine and creed. To positive and rigid natures the roundness of the world is bewildering; they must needs have a four-square scheme of things, mapped out in black and white; and when they meet with anything that does not fit into their scheme, they do not "as a stranger give it welcome"; they either ignore it, or treat it as a monster. They are perfectly at ease with general maxims and principles, which are simple only because they are partly false. What does not admit of this kind of statement they incline to treat as immoral, not without some sense of personal indignity. They ask a poet what he believes, and the answer does not satisfy them. A poet believes nothing but what he sees. The power of his utterance springs from this, that all his statements carry with them the immediate warrant of experience. Where dull minds rest on proverbs and apply them, he reverses the process, his brilliant general statements of truth are sudden divinations born of experience, sparks thrown out into the darkness from the luminous centre of his own self-knowledge Dramatic genius, which is sometimes treated as though it could dispense with experience, is in truth a capacity for experience, and for widening and applying experience by intelligence and sympathy. When we find a poet speaking confidently of matters that seem to lie wholly outside the possible limits of his own immediate knowledge, we are tempted to credit him with magic powers We are deceived; we forget the profusion of impressions that are poured in upon us, every day and every hour, through the channels of the senses, so that the quickest mind cannot grasp or realise a hundredth part of them. A story has often been told of an ignorant servant-girl,

who in the delirium of fever recited long screeds of Hebrew, which she had learned, all unconsciously, from overhearing the mutterings of the Hebrew scholar who was her master. The fine frenzy of a poet's brain gives to it something of the same abnormal quickness of apprehension and memory. When the mind is stirred by passion, or heated by the fire of imagination, all kinds of trivial and forgotten things rise to the surface and take on a new significance.

Try as we may, we can never find Shakespeare talking in vague and general terms of that which lay beyond his vision. He testifies of what he knows. But if we attempt to argue backwards and to recreate his personal history from a study of his cosmic wisdom, we fall into a trap. There are so many ways of learning a thing; and so many of the most important lessons are repeated daily. Take any random example of Shakespeare's lore:

> How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
> Make deeds ill done.

Or, again:

> O Opportunity, thy guilt is great;
> 'Tis thou that execut'st the traitor's treason;
> Thou set'st the wolf where he the lamb may get;
> Whoever plots the sin, thou point'st the season.

It is reasonable to think that there were events and moments in Shakespeare's life which brought this truth home to him. But who can guess what they were? The truth itself is proved and known by every infant. A similar insecurity attaches to almost all inferences made from Shakespeare's writings to the events of his life. He speaks with unmistakably deep feeling of the faithlessness of friends, of inequality in

the marriage-bond of lightness in woman and of lust in man. Phantom events have been found for all these utterances; and indeed many of them do irresistibly suggest a background of bitter personal reminiscence. But the generative moments between experience and his soul have passed beyond recovery, as they were doubtless many of them lost to his own remembrance long before he died. What remains is the child of his passion; and that child is immortal.

There is a description in Johnson's account of his friend Savage which might be more extensively applied to the workings of poetic and particularly of dramatic genius. "His mind," says Johnson, "was in an uncommon degree vigorous and active. His judgment was accurate, his apprehension quick, and his memory so tenacious, that he was frequently observed to know what he had learned from others in a short time, better than those by whom he was informed, and could frequently recollect incidents with all their combination of circumstances, which few would have regarded at the present time, but which the quickness of his apprehension impressed upon him. He had the art of escaping from his own reflections, and accommodating himself to every new scene. To this quality is to be imputed the extent of his knowledge, compared with the small time which he spent in visible endeavours to acquire it. He mingled in cursory conversation with the same steadiness of attention as others apply to a lecture; and amidst the appearance of thoughtless gaiety lost no new idea that was started, nor any hint that could be improved. He had therefore made in coffee-houses the same proficiency as others in their closets; and it is remarkable, that the writings of a man of little education and little reading have an air of learning scarcely to be found in

any other performances." Reinstate the Elizabethan taverns in place of the coffee-houses, and every word of this description is probably true of Shakespeare. If we may infer anything from his writings, we may be sure of this, that he had the art of giving himself wholly to his company, and accommodating himself to every new scene. This is a strong personal trait in him, though it does not help us to picture him as what is usually called a character. He presents none of those angles and whimsicalities which lend themselves to caricature. Those of his contemporaries who tried to parody his style generally fastened on the high strain of rhetoric which he assigns to such a character as Hotspur—

> By Heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon.

It cannot be denied that Shakespeare had a great love of sumptuous rhetoric; he had also a very happy, humorous knack of contrasting it with reality. Here, as elsewhere, he is found on both sides. Sometimes he seems to be caught in the business and desire of the world, and to be inviting us to commit ourselves to a party. But he is not to be trusted; he will rise to his heights again, and look out on the battle from the mount of humour and contemplation. Some of the most living characters in his plays are those who prefer thus to look on life—Biron, Falstaff, Hamlet, Prospero. They have all, in one sense or another, failed at practical business; but the width and truth of their vision is never impaired, and they are dear to Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, then, was not a character in the narrow sense of that word, or in any sense which may be readily grasped by minds accustomed to shorthand

expressions and ridiculous simplifications of the human problem. *The study of him, in his habit as he lived,* would have baffled those lovers of character who drew Sir Roger de Coverley, Parson Adams, and Colonel Newcome. Nevertheless, as we grow familiar with his work, we are overwhelmed by the sense that we are in the presence of a living man. When we read his comedies, we catch the infection of mirth that we know to be his. As we draw near to the awful close of *King Lear* or of *Othello*, and feel the fibres of our being almost torn asunder, the comfort that comes to us when quiet falls on the desolate scene is the comfort of the sure knowledge that Shakespeare is with us; that he who saw these things felt them as we do, and found in the splendours of courage and love a remedy for despair. When he states both sides of a question, and seems to leave the balance wavering, he is still expressing his own mind, even by refusing the choice Or, it may be, our understanding is too dull, and he counted on us rashly in leaving so much to our sympathy and intuition. But everywhere, even where we follow with uncertain steps, we feel the pressure of his hand, and are aware that all the knowledge that we gather by the way is knowledge of him, authorised and communicated by himself.

What we learn from the poor remainder of contemporary judgments is in perfect agreement, so far as it goes, with what the plays tell us. The epithets that are applied to Shakespeare and his work show a strong family likeness; he is called "ingenious," "mellifluous," "silver-tongued"; his industry is "happy and copious"; he was "honest, and of an open and free nature"; and always he is "the gentle Shakespeare." If we could make his living acquaintance, we should expect to find

in him one of those well-balanced and plastic tempers which enable men to attract something less than their due share of observation and remark as they pass to and fro among their fellows. Children, we feel sure, did not stop their talk when he came near them, but continued, in the happy assurance that it was only Master Shakespeare. The tradition of geniality clings to his name like a faded perfume. Every one was more himself for being in the company of Shakespeare. This is not speculation, but truth: without such a gift he could not have come by his knowledge of mankind. Those lofty and severe tempers who, often to their own shame, make others feel abashed and shy, could by no possibility, even if they were dramatically minded, collect the materials of Shakespeare's drama. If, by a miracle, they could come up with the women and children, the rogues and vagabonds would evade them. Cordelia, because she was pitiful and generous, they might propitiate; but by no cunning could they come within earshot of the soliloquy of Autolycus. There is a kind of ingrained humility and lovableness in the character of those who are not righteous overmuch; even a saint may miss it in the very act of taking pains; but it was a part of the native endowment of Shakespeare, and a chief means of his proficiency in his craft.

It need not be said that Shakespeare was a whole-hearted lover of pleasure, in himself and in others. His enormous zest in life makes his earlier comedies a paradise of delight. The love of pleasure, if it be generous, and sensitive, and quick to catch reflections, is hardly distinguishable from wisdom and tact. It has no respect for the self-torturing energies of a vengeful and brooding mind, or for those bitter thoughts which spend themselves in a vain agony

upon the immutable past. Shakespeare's villains and evil characters are all self-absorbed and miserable and retrospective. They belong to the terrible army of cripples, who employ the best skill of their four senses to avenge upon others the loss of a fifth. Jealousy, born of deprivation, is a passion as common as mud; to Shakespeare's thinking it is the core of all uttermost evil. Deprivation sweetly taken, with no thought of doubling the pain by invoking a wicked justice; love that does not alter when it finds alteration, but strengthens itself to make amends for the defect of others—these are the materials of the pinnacle whereon he raises his highest examples of human goodness. His own nature sought happiness as a plant turns to the light and air; he pays his tribute of admiration to all who achieve happiness by ways however strange; and his cult of happiness brought him his ultimate reward in that suffused glow of light reflected from the joy of a younger world, which illuminates his latest plays.

If we find Shakespeare's character difficult to understand, we may take this much comfort, that here too Shakespeare is with us His character was not all of a piece, neat and harmonious and symmetrical The tragic conflicts which are the themes of his greatest plays were projected by him from the intestinal warfare and insurrections of the kingdom of his mind. One such civil strife is pre-eminent among the rest, and has left its traces deep on his poetry. It is not the world-old struggle between reason and affection, between the counsels of passion and the cool dictates of prudence, although that struggle is wonderfully illustrated in many of the plays, and an equal justice is done to both parties. But the central drama of his mind is the tragedy of the life of imagination. He

was a lover of clear decisive action, and of the deed done. He knew and condemned the sentiment which fondly nurses itself and is without issue. Yet, on the other hand, the gift of imagination with which he was so richly dowered, the wide, restless, curious searchings of the intelligence and the sympathies—these faculties, strong in him by nature, and strengthened every day by the exercise of his profession, bade fair at times to take sole possession, and to paralyse the will. Then he revolted against himself, and was almost inclined to bless that dark, misfeatured messenger called the angel of this life, "whose care is lest men see too much at once." If for the outlook of a God the seer must neglect the opportunities and duties of a man, may not the price paid be too high? It is a dilemma known to all poets,—to all men, indeed, who live the exhausting life of the imagination, and grapple hour by hour, in solitude and silence, with the creatures of their mind, while the passing invitations of humanity, which never recur, are ignored or repelled. Keats knew the position well, and has commented on it, though not tragically, in some passages of his letters. "Men of Genius," he says, "are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—but they have not any individuality, any determined Character." And again: "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body." Keats also recognised, as well as Shakespeare, that man cannot escape the call to action, and it was he who said—"I am convinced more and more, every day, that fine writing is, next to fine doing, the top thing in the world." But what if this highest call come suddenly, as it always does, and find the man unnerved and unready, given over to "sensations and

day-nightmares," absorbed in speculation, out of himself, and unable to respond? A famous English painter was once, at his own request, bound to the mast during a storm at sea, in order that he might study the pictorial effects of sky and water. His help was not wanted in the working of the ship; he was not one of the crew. Who among men, in the conduct of his own life, dare claim a like exemption?

Shakespeare certainly made no such claim; but he knew the anguish of the divided mind, and had suffered from the tyranny of the imagination. It can hardly be said that he was over-balanced by his imaginative powers: they were all needed for his matchless achievement, and it was by their most potent aid that he won through, in the end, to peace and security. But no one can read his plays and not feel the fierce strain that they put upon him. His pictures of the men in whom imagination is predominant—Richard II, Hamlet, Macbeth—are among the most wonderful in his gallery, the most closely studied, and intimately realised. But not even the veil of drama can hide from us the admiration and devotion that he feels for those other men to whom action is easy—Hotspur, the bastard Faulconbridge, or, chief of all, Othello. These are the natural lords of human-kind. Shakespeare holds the balance steady: a measure of the subtle speculative power of Hamlet might have saved Othello from being made a murderer; it could not have increased Shakespeare's love for him.

The truth is that Shakespeare, by revealing his whole mind to us, has given us just cause to complain that his mind is not small enough to be comprehended with ease. It is one of man's most settled habits, when he meets with anything that is new and strange, to be

unhappy until he has named it, and, when he has named it, to be for ever at rest. Science is retarded not a little by the false sense of explanation that comes from the use of Greek and Latin names, which, when they are examined, prove to be nothing but laborious descriptions of the facts to be explained. The naming and re-naming of Shakespeare, which has gone on merrily for centuries under the care of sponsors good and evil, is more mischievous than this: the names given to him are not even fairly descriptive of a difficulty. They are labels impudently affixed to one aspect or another of his many-sided work. Books have been written to prove that he was an atheist; that he was a Roman Catholic; that he was an Anglican; that he was a man deeply imbued with the traditions and sentiments of a Puritanic home—for, to the credit of human intelligence be it recorded, no one has yet said, in so many words, that he was a Puritan. Party government was not invented in his day; but much ink has been spent on the attempt to classify his political convictions, and to reduce them to a type. If those attempts had been successful, they would help us but little. A creed, religious or political, is the voice of a community rather than the expression of individual character: if Shakespeare were fitted with a creed, the personal differences which made him what he was would remain as dark as ever. Men are the dupes of their own games. There are writers on grave themes who cannot dispense with metaphors drawn from the cricket-field. There are historical and literary philosophers to whom Whig and Tory are the alpha and omega of criticism. Party names are exhilarating; they mean a side taken, and a fight. But it is perhaps not unnatural that language invented for the practical needs of controversy should prove wholly inadequate

to illuminate the shifting phases of the life of contemplation.

Shakespeare was that rarest of all things, a whole man. It is only warped and stunted partisans who are unable to see any virtue or truth on the other side. A Catholic who finds no force in the Protestant position, a Protestant who has never felt the fascination of the Catholic ideal,—these are not the best of their kind; and if all were like them, the strife of party would sink below the level of humanity. They are "damn'd, like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side." But even among those whose width of sympathy keeps life sweet, there are few indeed who dare court comparison with Shakespeare's utter freedom of thought. He will never buy favour and familiarity with one party at the price of neglecting or miscalling another. He loved the Court, and the country. He believed in authority, and in liberty. He could say, with Troilus—

> I am as true as truth's simplicity,
> And simpler than the infancy of truth;

and with Autolycus—

> How bless'd are we that are not simple men!

He was at one with Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, when she gives utterance to the central truth of Christianity:

> Alas, alas:
> Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once,
> And he that might the vantage best have took,
> Found out the remedy;

and with Gloucester, in *King Lear*, when from the depths of his despair he impugns the mercy of Heaven:

> As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods;
> They kill us for their sport.

He is, in a word, a seer and a sceptic. There is no contradiction in all this. Large minds are open and wise, where small minds are close and cunning. Those who have never seen more than a little dare not express all their doubts. The blind have infinite difficulty in determining what is visible; and men of robust faith laugh loud and free, where half-believers are timid, and fearful lest they should stumble into blasphemy. We look in vain for reticences and partialities in Shakespeare, little devices of shelter and concealment; he will not let us "nestle into a corner of his mind and think from there"; he keeps us out of doors, and we find the width of his vision fatiguing, the freedom of his movements bewildering. He is at home in the world; and we complain that the place is too large for us, the visitation of the winds too rough and unceremonious. Perhaps we venture even to carp at the width of his outlook,—does it permit a man to attend to his own affairs, does it not wrap him in a humorous sadness, "compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects," and unfit him for the duty of the hour? But Shakespeare's apology for his own life is more than sufficient. We know something of what he felt and thought, for he has told us. If we ask what he did, his answer admits of no human retort—he wrote his plays.

The breadth and impartiality of Shakespeare's view of things has been recognised in that great commonplace of criticism which compares him with Nature. The critics say many and various things; but they all say this. On the tablet under his bust in Stratford Church he is called "Shakespeare, with whom quick Nature died." Ben Jonson continues and enlarges the comparison:

> Nature herself was proud of his designs,
> And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines.

Milton celebrates his "native woodnotes wild." "He was the man," says Dryden, "who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there." So the figure is handed on, and is elaborated and heightened. It gives Pope his happiest sentence: "The Poetry of Shakespeare was Inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitator, as an Instrument, of Nature; and 'tis not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks thro' him." Johnson repeats the same theme. "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life." To these formal verdicts must be added all that wealth of metaphor which is spent on the effort to rise to the occasion: Shakespeare's irregularities, says Pope, are like the irregularities of "an ancient majestic piece of Gothic Architecture, compared with a neat Modern building"; his work, says Johnson, differs from that of more correct writers as a forest differs from a garden; his laugh, says Mr. Meredith, is "broad as ten thousand beeves at pasture" Nothing less than the visible world, in all its most various and imposing aspects, is accepted as a synonym for Shakespeare.

In so far as these comparisons are directed to setting forth the catholicity and sanity of Shakespeare's genius, they are just and true. The identification of Shakespeare with Nature is, nevertheless, somewhat

extravagant, and has made way for a host of fallacies. On a closer examination, it appears that no two of the critics mean the same thing by that Nature whom they invoke. Pope means originality; and contrasts Shakespeare, drawing direct from the life, with Homer, whose art "came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him." But what is here said of Homer has been proved, by later investigation, to be very exactly true of Shakespeare. Johnson intends modesty and probability: Shakespeare has no heroes, only men; he keeps love in its proper place as an agent in human affairs; his dialogue is level with life. What Milton was thinking of is not very certain; he may be praising the spontaneity of the lyrics, or remembering the pastoral and woodland scenes of the comedies; in either case he is far enough from Pope and Johnson. Lesser critics have drawn the comparison into a wild diversity of error. Some, like John Ward, Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, and unlike Ben Jonson, have judged Shakespeare to be "a natural wit, without any art at all." Others, whose name is legion, have held that since Shakespeare is Nature, the right way to study him is the way of the naturalist; they have treated his work as if it were an encyclopædia of information, and have parcelled it out in provinces, writing immeasurable books on Shakespeare's divinity, Shakespeare's heraldry, Shakespeare's law and medicine, Shakespeare's birds, beasts, fishes, and insects,—all tacitly proceeding on the strange assumption that it was a part of Shakespeare's purpose to impart an accurate knowledge of those branches of learning, and that by his success his true greatness may be judged. These are the entomologists of criticism: to the less learned populace the Nature simile has

been an excuse for sheer lack of criticism; they have persisted in their old, lazy, unimaginative habit of considering Shakespeare's men and women as the creatures of nature, rather than of dramatic art. Let us make an end of this, and do justice to Shakespeare the craftsman. The great hyperbole which confuses him with his Creator has served its original ceremonial purpose; it is time to remember that the King is but a man, and that all his senses have but human conditions.

One quality which has been attributed to Shakespeare in his character of Nature, and has been used to fortify the parallel, is certainly his by right. A very old and persistent tradition makes him the master of an incomparable ease and fluency. "His mind and hand went together," say his friends and editors, Heminge and Condell, "and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." The credibility of these witnesses has been attacked, even their good faith has been questioned, but here, at least, is a statement which, in its main drift, every reader of Shakespeare feels to be true. Nor does it lack strong confirmation. "He had an excellent phantasy," says Ben Jonson, "brave notions and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped." No one who has ever been caught in the torrent of Shakespeare's ideas and metaphors could mistake him for a slow, painful, and laborious writer. The frank geniality of the man and the excitable fervour of the talker are matched by the unchecked exuberance of the poet. Economy is no part of his habitual method. He does not waylay his meaning, and capture it at a blow, but hunts it with a full cry

of hounds, attended by a gay and motley company. His mind is rich in ornaments, images, and afterthoughts. His style is full of incidents and surprises; when he makes an end he has commonly told you far more than he set out to tell you. In his later plays he is more condensed, not by the chastening of his method, but by the crowded enrichment of his matter. Always the method is the same; the phrase or sentence that does not quite do his business is retained in his service, and another is added to compete with it and overtake it; wave follows wave and breaks short of the goal, until, at the ninth time of asking, the master-wave gathers the others into itself, and surrounds you and lifts you. When he becomes severe and bare, as he commonly does at the top of his tragic passion, it is not by the excision of superfluities, but by the very intensity of the situation, which catches his eloquent fancy by the throat, and compels him to put his meaning into a few broken words. Let but the grip of facts be relaxed for a moment, his discursive imagination rouses itself again, and the full current of speech is resumed. In this way Shakespeare often gives a double expressiveness to a tragic crisis, and alternates dramatic silence with poetic eloquence. The high-strung whispered conversation of Macbeth with his wife, carried on in monosyllables of question and reply, is followed at once by his great imaginative outburst on the murder of innocent sleep. The parting of Troilus and Cressida is first made beautiful by the poetic lament of Troilus:

> We two, that with so many thousand sighs
> Did buy each other, must poorly sell ourselves
> With the rude brevity and discharge of one.
> Injurious Time now with a robber's haste
> Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how:

As many farewells as be stars in heaven,
With distinct breath and consign'd kisses to them,
He fumbles up into a loose adieu;
And scants us with a single famish'd kiss,
Distasting with the salt of broken tears.

Then crude fact has its turn, and the voice of Aeneas is heard calling—

My Lord, is the Lady ready?

It would be difficult to name any moving situation in Shakespeare where he does not find or make an opportunity to give a loose to his pen and to pour out some scantling at least of the riotous wealth of his imagination. His ease is so great, that his wildest conceits hardly seem far-fetched. They throng about him like poor suitors proffering their services, and the magnificence of his generosity finds them work to do.

For an intimate knowledge of Shakespeare we are dependent chiefly on his book. Yet some facts of his life are recorded in extant documents, and some others may be accepted, without too great a risk, from tradition and allusion. It is just possible that the store of facts concerning him may yet be increased. But it is not likely, now that antiquaries and scholars have toiled for generations, with an industry beyond all praise, in the search for lost memorials. These are the diligent workers among the ruins, who, when the fabric of our knowledge has crumbled to atoms, still

As for seed of stars stoop for the sand,
And by incessant labour gather all.

The enthusiasm which keeps them at work has been truly described by one of the chief of them, Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps. "No journey," he says, "is too long, no trouble too great, if there is a possibility of

either resulting in the discovery of the minutest scrap of information respecting the life of our national poet." By these ungrudging labours all that we are entitled to hope for has been achieved, and the Life of Shakespeare begins to assume the appearance of a scrap-heap of respectable size. Many, perhaps the majority, of the facts preserved have lost their connection and meaning, so that, unless we are willing to eke them out with a liberal fancy, they serve us not at all in our effort to portray the man. Another and a more valuable resource is left to us. We may study the human conditions which affected his life and work. The habits and customs, the ideas and tendencies of his own age, make a living background for him, and are everywhere reflected in his plays. These, in a certain sense, supplied him with his material; and to these must be added the books that he read, the histories that he rifled for their information, and the poems and plays that he studied for their art. Even more important than the material of his art is the instrument, fashioned for him by others, and only slightly modified by himself. To become a popular playwright, which Shakespeare certainly was, a man must adapt his treatment of human life to the requirements of the stage on which his plays are presented; he must consult the abilities of the members of his company, and fit them with likely parts; further—let it not be thought a disgrace to mention a condition which Shakespeare endeavoured, with zeal and success, to fulfil—he must study the tastes and expectations of his audience, and indulge them with what they approve. All this he must do, yet not forget the other. His own vision of poetic beauty and his own interpretation of human life are to be set forth under these rigid conditions and conventions. Here is the

artist's opportunity: to observe the convention, as he observes the formalities of the sonnet, yet to make its very restraints a means of greater triumph, to subdue them and use them towards the accomplishment of his own most serious meaning. In nothing is Shakespeare's greatness more apparent than in his concessions to the requirements of the Elizabethan theatre, concessions made sparingly and with an ill grace by some of his contemporaries, by him offered with both hands, yet transmuted in the giving, so that what might have been a mere connivance in baseness becomes a miracle of expressive art. The audience asked for bloodshed, and he gave them *Hamlet.* They asked for foolery, and he gave them *King Lear.*

Lastly, to understand Shakespeare, it is necessary to study the subtlest of his instruments—the language that he wielded. Here the good progress made in recent times by the science of language is of little avail. most of the masters of that science are men who know all that can be known about language except the uses to which it is put The methods of science are invaluable, and they will prove fruitful in the study of Shakespeare when they come to be applied by those who understand how poetry is made, and who join the end to the beginning. Without a knowledge of common Elizabethan usages, colloquial and literary, it is impossible to give Shakespeare the due share of credit for his handling of his native speech. His amazing wealth of vocabulary and idiom, his coinages and violent distortions of meaning, his freedoms of syntax and analogy, comparable only to the freedoms that are habitual in the "little language" of a family of children,—all these things must be assessed, and compared with the normal standards of his time, before they can be known for a part of him.

The dogmatic grammarians, a race not yet extinct, make rules for language as the Aristotelians made rules for the epic poem, and impose their chill models on submissive decadence. Much of Shakespeare's language is language hot from the mind, and only partially hardened into grammar. It cannot be judged save by those whose ease of apprehension goes some way to meet his ease of expression.

Here, then, is matter enough and to spare. A brief essay cannot hope to achieve much. 'Tis too late to be ambitious. Among the topics, old and new, which are fit for treatment, a selection must be made, and of those selected none can be exhaustively handled. What is chosen shall be chosen with a single aim in view: the mind of Shakespeare is to be seen at work; and to that end the raw material of his craft, and the nature of the tools that he employed, must be considered in the closest possible connection with that marvellous body of poetry which, by its vitality and beauty, has cast some shadow of disesteem on the forgotten processes of its making.

CHAPTER II

STRATFORD AND LONDON

William Shakespeare came of a family of yeomen in the county of Warwick. The name was a common one in many parts of England, and during the sixteenth century occurs in some twenty-four places of that county alone. There were several William Shakespeares. One was drowned in the Avon and buried at Warwick in 1579. Another, some forty years later, was a small farmer's agent; and perhaps it was he, not the creator of Shylock, who in 1604 sued Philip Rogers for £1, 15s 10d, the price of malt supplied. A third, the son of John Shakespeare, Chamberlain of the borough, was baptized at Stratford on the 26th of April 1564, and lived to be the author of the plays.

It seems probable that Shakespeare's grandfather was one Richard Shakespeare, a small farmer at Snitterfield, and a tenant of the Ardens of Wilmecote. Of this Richard we know nothing to the purpose; he is a name and a shadow, flitting through the records of the time. John Shakespeare, the poet's father, is the first of the stock whom it is possible to draw in outline, and to conceive as a character. He came to Stratford not later than 1552, and there traded in farm produce as glover, dealer in wool, and butcher. The diversity of the trades assigned to him need cause no incredulity; such a combination was possible

enough in a town surrounded by pasture-land, and seems to testify to his restless enterprise in business. He prospered rapidly, was successful in small law-suits, acquired property, married an heiress, and was advanced to high office, becoming, in a short series of years, ale-taster, constable, affeeror, chamberlain, alderman; lastly, when his son William was four years old, he attained the summit of his municipal ambition, and appears as Justice of the Peace and High Bailiff of the Town. Then his affairs declined; he who was wont to be plaintiff and triumphant creditor assumes the more melancholy character of defendant and insolvent debtor; he mortgages his wife's estate, absents himself from the meetings of the Town Council, is deprived of his alderman's gown, ceases to attend church and is presented as a recusant; but continues, as he began, incurably litigious. During his later years we hear no more of financial difficulties, and it has been reasonably assumed that the success of his son restored the family fortunes. At the close of the century he succeeded, after repeated applications, in obtaining the grant of a coat-of-arms; in 1601 he died, and was buried at Stratford. The bare facts, so far as they lend themselves to portraiture, seem to supply suggestions for the picture of an energetic, pragmatic, sanguine, frothy man, who was always restlessly scheming and could not make good his gains. "He spread his bread with all sorts of butter, yet none would stick thereon." We guess him to have been of a mercurial temperament, and are not surprised to find that he was a lover of dramatic shows. During his tenure of the office of High Bailiff, wandering companies of players make their first recorded appearance at Stratford, and perform before the Town Council, receiving money for their pains. In business he seems to have been

fervent, unsteady, and irrepressible; in speech he may well have been excitable, sententious, and dogmatic. It is worthy of notice that Shakespeare, in his earlier plays, shows but scant regard for the wisdom of the older generation. In *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* the seniors are troublesome stage-fathers, impertinent, dull-witted, talkative, moral, and asinine. The speculation is impious, but stranger things are true, and if the father of Charles Dickens lent his likeness to Mr. Micawber, it is at least possible that some not unkindly memories of the paternal advices of John Shakespeare have been preserved for us in the sage maxims of Polonius. Some fathers of famous writers we feel to have been better men than their sons, saner, more modest, and preserved from fame not by their lack of vigour, but by their hatred of excess. Such was the father of Thomas Carlyle. Others by their very extravagances have helped to school their sons into sanity and wisdom; the fervour of their temper has passed on undiminished, but their miscarriages leave much work to do, and their failings teach self-criticism to those who succeed them. Such perhaps, was the father of William Shakespeare.

His mother, Mary Arden, was a small heiress, and, what is more important, seems to have been of gentle birth. "By the spindle-side," says that excellent antiquary, Mrs. Stopes, "his pedigree can be traced straight back to Guy of Warwick and the good King Alfred. There is something in fallen fortune that lends a subtler romance to the consciousness of a noble ancestry, and we may be sure this played no small part in the making of the poet." And this is not all. Shakespeare was "to the manner born." From the very first he has an unerringly sure touch with the character of his high-born ladies, he knows

clouds that steal across his face, of the "canker in the fragrant rose," and of the ruin of autumn,

> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,

—all these things are utterly unlike the laborious notes of a descriptive writer; they have put on immortality in metaphor, and come readily to hand because they are a part of his own life, and have been taught to speak the language of his own thought.

To a lover of human drama, the moving incidents of life in the country, and the excitements of sport and the chase, must have been full of interest. There can be no doubt that Shakespeare was minutely acquainted with all the lore of field-sports,—the hunt of the hare and the stag, and the capture of smaller game by the falcon. His knowledge of these things, as Mr. Vice-Chancellor Madden has shown, would have done credit to an old huntsman. It is true that here also he uses his knowledge by way of illustration, and so seems to appeal to an audience well versed in the terms of sport. Even Juliet is perfectly accomplished in the tongue:

> Hist, Romeo, hist! O for a falconer's voice
> To lure this tassel-gentle back again!

In her beautiful invocation to Night, the quick flushing of her cheeks, as she waits for the sun to set, suggests a whole parable of hawking, and of taming, or "manning," wild hawks, as they "bate," or flutter on the perch, by the use of a velvet hood:

> Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,
> With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,
> Think true love acted simple modesty.

There is no play of Shakespeare's without some of

these allusions, and he is as familiar with the points of a horse and the kinds and qualities of hounds and deer as with the forgotten science of falconry. But it would seem that some part, at least, of his knowledge is the knowledge of an onlooker rather than a huntsman. He is true here to his own wide sympathy, and cannot forget the quarry in the chase—true also, perhaps, to his earliest memories. Two of his most wonderful pictures are, first, the description, in *As You Like It*, of the anguish of the sequestered stag, wounded by the hunters; and, yet more vivid, the picture drawn in *Venus and Adonis* of poor Wat, the hare, standing erect, in a passion of apprehension, listening for the distant cry of the hounds:

> Then shalt thou see the dew-bedabbled wretch
> Turn, and return, indenting with the way;
> Each envious briar his weary legs doth scratch,
> Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay:
>   For misery is trodden on by many,
>   And being low, never reliev'd by any.

Is not this a description of the hunt as it might be seen by a boy playing truant from school, and choosing a brake near a hill top as a vantage-ground for observation and concealment?

As for Natural History in the modern sense, Shakespeare knew little about it, and cared even less. The social life of the humbler creatures did not engage his attention. It has been truly said that he was "curiously unobservant of animated Nature." The habits of birds and beasts and fishes seem to come immediately under his eye only when they touch the daily interests of average humanity. When he wants an illustration from animal life for the figurative exposition of his thought, he is content, as often as not, to make use of the commodious lies of picturesque

tradition. The toad that wears a precious jewel in his head, the unicorn that is betrayed with trees, the basilisk that kills at sight, the bear-whelp that is licked into shape by its mother, the pelican that feeds her young with her own blood, the phœnix of Arabia, the serpent of Egypt, and the Hyrcan tiger,—all these he accepts without question for the decoration of his style. When he deals with creatures nearer home he follows the same plan, and adopts all those popular prejudices which have embedded themselves in the phrases of daily speech. "Dog"—except when the dog helps in the chase—he commonly uses as a term of vituperation. Cats are "creatures we count not worth the hanging." In these usages he is merely taking words as he finds them, and refusing to impoverish the language of abuse by a forlorn protest on behalf of the goose, the ass, the ape, the dog, or the cat. When Launce's dog, Crab, makes his bodily appearance on the stage, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* these ancient prejudices are discarded, and the dog is admitted to fellowship with man. But the wild creatures of the fields and the woods, because they have never run the risk of familiarity with slanderous man, are for the most part outside this argument of rhetorical usage; and are outside the circle of Shakespeare's sympathetic observation. The encyclopædic and naturalist critics have made plentiful assertions to the contrary; Dr. Brandes, accepting the myth, has praised Shakespeare for his "astonishing store of natural knowledge," and his inexhaustible familiarity with the habits of animals. The following are the examples invoked for proof: Shakespeare knew that the greyhound's mouth catches; that pigeons feed their young; that herrings are bigger than pilchards; that trout are caught

with tickling; that the lapwing runs close to the ground; that the cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other birds; that the lark resembles the bunting. Many a city-bred boy knows all this and more. And these statements are cited because, in the main, they are true. Shakespeare's errors would make a longer tale His nightingale and his cuckoo are creatures falsified out of all knowledge by the accumulated fables of tradition. The famous passage on the bees, in *Henry V.*, is glittering poetry; but "as a description of a hive," says a critic of knowledge and parts, "it is utter nonsense, with an error of fact in every other line, and instinct throughout with a total misconception of the great bee parable." Virgil knew something of the bee; Shakespeare little or nothing.

Let this suffice: it would be a tedious task to attempt to demolish all the foolish piles that have been erected with intent to honour the poet. Shakespeare was a master of language, and a profound student of the human mind. His comparative ignorance of Natural History does him no discredit. There is a story of Canning, which John Hookham Frere told one day to his nephew. "I remember," he said, "going to consult Canning on a matter of great importance to me, when he was staying down near Enfield. We walked into the woods to have a quiet talk, and as we passed some ponds I was surprised to find it was a new light to him that tadpoles turned into frogs. Now," said the teller of the tale, "don't you go and repeat that story of Canning to the next fool you meet. Canning could rule, and did rule, a great and civilised nation; but in these days people are apt to fancy that any one who does not know the natural history of frogs must be an imbecile in the treatment of men."

If Shakespeare made no minute study of the cat, the nightingale, and the bee, he had the quickest eye for the habits of the vagrant, the watchman of a town, and the schoolmaster. He has left us a very realistic picture of an Elizabethan Latin-lesson in that scene of *The Merry Wives* where Sir Hugh Evans examines little William on his knowledge of Lilly's Grammar. The three head-masters who reigned at Stratford from 1570 to 1580 were Walter Roche, Thomas Hunt, and Thomas Jenkins; and Sir Hugh Evans may perhaps bear some resemblance to the last of these. The more elaborately drawn and pedantic Holofernes, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Pinch, schoolmaster and conjurer, in *The Comedy of Errors*, occurring, as they do, in very early plays, probably owe some hints to the schoolmaster whom Shakespeare knew best, and may thus preserve for us a savour of the ideas and apprehensions "begot in the ventricle of memory, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion" by Master Thomas Hunt. Holofernes is the complete academic grammarian. But the extreme gauntness of his visage, so boisterously ridiculed by the courtiers, is only one of many indications that Shakespeare had a lean actor in his early company.

At the Grammar School much time was "bestowed on the tongues," and there is no reason to reduce Shakespeare's "small Latin" to the mere repetition of a grammar. A working knowledge of the Latin language was commoner in that age than in this, and it is certain that he could read Latin when he was so minded. The ordinary school course would take a boy, by the time he was fourteen years of age, through parts at least of Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Plautus, Seneca, and Cicero, besides introducing him to the elements of Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. Yet, for

all that, Shakespeare was no Latin scholar, and in his maturer years we find him using a translation, wherever there was one to be had, in preference to the original. The most popular Latin author of his age was Ovid; and he certainly knew Ovid, for he quotes him in the original more than once, and chooses a motto for *Venus and Adonis* from the Elegies. But his more elaborate borrowings from Ovid come, for the most part, by way of Arthur Golding's translations in doggerel verse. He studied the classics, that is to say, not chiefly for their form, but for their matter; Ovid he valued as a story-teller who revealed a new and enchanting world of fable and imagination. It is possible, but not likely, that he had a smattering of Greek; if he had, it was so little as to make the question hardly worth a minute investigation. The formal study of Logic and Rhetoric left a deeper impression on his mind, and gave him keen delight. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a carnival of pedantry, and just as a good clown must needs be a good acrobat, so he who shows such skill in deriding these gymnastics of the intellect proves himself to have been carefully exercised in them. To the end of his life Shakespeare never uses the mechanical processes of Logic and Rhetoric without lending them a touch of delightful absurdity. His syllogisms and classifications, his figures and distinctions, his formal devices whereby set propositions are amplified and confirmed — all bear witness to his studies.

> He hath prosperous art
> When he will play with reason and discourse.

His very "argal" prepares us for laughter. He riots in the multiplication of processes to attain a simple end, and, while comedy is his business, will never

refuse to climb o'er the house to unlock the little gate. "It is a figure in Rhetoric," says Touchstone, "that drink, being pour'd out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other." Beyond these voices of pedants and jesters we hear the verdict of the dramatist, and the conclusion of the whole matter, uttered in a single sentence:

Learning is but an adjunct to ourself.

If he learned little Latin at school, it is the more to be regretted; he certainly learned little else. For a knowledge of modern history he was dependent on his own reading, on conversation, and tradition. He would hear much, though hardly in open discussion, of the Protestant Reformation and the religious troubles. These were things to be spoken of warily: as for writing—"Whosoever," says Sir Walter Raleigh, "in writing a modern History, shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth." Among those earlier events which had already, in the time of his childhood, passed outside the heat of controversy, the Wars of the Roses loomed incomparably the largest, and appealed most to the popular imagination. That great civil strife was no further removed in time from the boyhood of Shakespeare than is the battle of Trafalgar from the children of to-day; and the force of tradition was then far more potent than it can ever be in an age of primers. It was still the fashion, in winter's tedious nights, to sit by the fire with good old folks, and listen to their tales

Of woful ages long ago betid.

The rivalry of the houses of York and Lancaster had been the destroyer of mediæval England and the creator and upholder of the Tudor monarchy,

which was founded on the memory of those internecine horrors, and was strengthened by the fear of their recurrence. To prevent another disputed succession England was willing to go all lengths, even to the bringing in of the Stuart dynasty. Shakespeare's great historical epic shows a familiarity with the struggle in all its phases such as can hardly have been acquired solely from books. This was the school where he learned his politics; by this light he read Roman history, and interpreted the feuds of Italian cities. The moral, which he is never tired of repeating, is the moral of the chronicler Hall; the English historical plays are written "so that all men, more clearer than the sun, may apparently perceive that as by discord great things decay and fall to ruin, so the same by concord be revived and erected." The bastard Faulconbridge, in his triumphant peroration at the close of *King John*, speaks to the same effect, and the woful prophecy in *Richard II.*, spoken by the Bishop of Carlisle at the very beginning of the long strife, is in reality a retrospect of the miseries that were not yet faded from the memory or forgotten in the daily talk of children's children.

Old tradition and the inherent probabilities of the case agree in withdrawing Shakespeare from school at a comparatively early age. What employment he followed when he left school we cannot certainly know. Aubrey reports, on good authority, that he had been "in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country." There is nothing conclusive to be said against this; and nothing to object to Aubrey's other statement that "when he was a boy, he exercised his father's trade, but when he killed a calf, he would do it in a high style, and make a speech." Imaginative children are wont to decorate many a less worthy

occasion with play-acting. We need not suppose that he found employ in a lawyer's office. He certainly has a remarkable knowledge of the processes and technicalities of the law: he was not the eldest son of his father for nothing. It seems almost certain, at least, that these years were passed in his native place, and that

> While other men of slender reputation
> Put forth their sons to seek preferment out:
> Some to the wars, to try their fortune there;
> Some to discover islands far away;
> Some to the studious Universities;

the son of John Shakespeare was still, perhaps against his inclination, a home-keeping youth. But the spirit of adventure is not to be denied. We are the sons of women; we cannot cross the cause why we are born. It would be difficult to conceive of Shakespeare as resting content with the beaten round, and rejecting all the enticements of young blood. "I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty," says the Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale*, "or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing, in the between, but getting wenches with child, wronging the Ancientry, stealing, fighting." When next we hear of Shakespeare, in 1582, he is to be married, not without circumstances of irregularity and haste, to Anne Hathaway, a woman some eight years his senior; six months thereafter his eldest child, Susanna, is born; in 1585 the twins, Hamnet and Judith, are added to his family; about the same time, or not much later, he is involved in serious trouble with Sir Thomas Lucy, the chief land-owner of the place, and leaves Stratford for London, there to seek his fortune. When he comes into notice

again, in 1592, the playwrights of the London stage are already beginning to find him a formidable rival.

The early traditions are agreed in attributing the departure from Stratford to a poaching affray and its consequences. He was "much given," says one early collector of gossip, "to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits." Rowe, in his *Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709), gives a fuller version of the story. Shakespeare joined with some companions in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy; for this he was prosecuted, and retorted in lampoons with such effect that the prosecution was redoubled, and he was driven from his home. All this is perfectly credible; the evidence that remains to us is unanimous in its favour; the allusions in the plays bear it out, and there is no solid argument against it. Yet some antiquaries of the nineteenth century have felt free to reject it, and to substitute for it an account of how things must have happened. *If we follow them here, we must reject* the whole body of tradition; and it is worth remarking that the Shakespeare traditions which have come down to us are, in the main, good traditions. They are not tainted in origin, and were not collected or published by any one who had a case to prove. Most of them derive from one or other of two sources: the commonplaces of local gossip at Stratford, or the stories remembered and repeated by those who had to do with the theatre. Shakespeare in his later years was a well-known man at Stratford, his daughters passed their lives there, Susanna dying in 1649 and Judith in 1662; and when Betterton made a pilgrimage to the place in order to collect the materials which were subsequently used by Rowe, there must have been many old inhabitants who had known them well.

A certain John Dowdall talked at Stratford, in the year 1693, with an old parish clerk who was born some years before Shakespeare died, and who told him "that this Shakespeare was formerly in this town bound apprentice to a butcher, but that he ran from his master to London, and there was received into the play-house as a servitor, and by this means had an opportunity to be what he afterwards proved. He was the best of his family." The tales told to Aubrey by the aged William Beeston, who belonged to an old-established family of play-actors, and the notes made, not later than 1663, by the Rev. John Ward, Vicar of Stratford, are no less deserving of belief; and if all these accounts be compared, they display no serious inconsistencies. It is the very vanity of scepticism to set all these aside in favour of a tissue of learned fancies.

The stage-tradition was no doubt grievously interrupted by the closing of the theatres and the dispersal of the actors under the Long Parliament. Yet though many of the actors died fighting for the King, some few survived to play a part on the Restoration stage; and Sir William Davenant, who in his boyhood had known Shakespeare, and in his early manhood had been intimate with Shakespeare's friends and fellows, carried on the unbroken line of theatrical tradition. When interest in the life of Shakespeare was first awakened, towards the close of the seventeenth century, there was no lay-figure of the dramatist, to which the facts must needs be fitted, and none of that regard for his supposed dignity, which has been allowed, in this half-educated age of critical theory, to distort the outlines of a plain tale.

Some pieces of information with regard to the plays come to us casually from these same traditional sources.

It is from Dryden we learn that "Shakespeare showed the best of his skill in his Mercutio; and he said himself that he was forced to kill him in the Third Act, to prevent being killed by him." It is by Dennis we are told that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written in fourteen days at the command of Queen Elizabeth, who desired to see Falstaff in love. These are welcome additions to our scanty store, and they fit in with what we know.

In London Shakespeare is said to have found "mean employment": a late and not flawless tradition gives him work as a holder of horses at the doors of the suburban theatres. He must have rapidly gained a footing within the theatre, so that his first steps to fortune are of the less account. Goldsmith, who hardly ever mentioned his own early struggles, once made a passing allusion to the days when he lived among the beggars in Axe Lane. Those days were days fruitful to him in experience; and Shakespeare's early years in London must have been alive with novelty and excitement, yielding him the richest part of his harvest of observation. The city was small, and not much unlike what it had been in Chaucer's day. Its main highway of traffic was still to be found where

clear and sweet and strong,
Thames' stream, scarce fettered, bore the bream along
Unto the bastioned bridge, its only chain.

The walls held the city compact, to the fields immediately beyond them the people resorted for pastime, or crossed the river to Southwark, there to see bear-baiting and fencing. Artillery practice was carried on in a field enclosed with a brick wall in Bishopsgate Without. In these same liberties, outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation, two theatres, at least, had

already been erected. Within the walls, though the open fields surrounded them, a motley and crowded population struggled and surged. Cheapside was as full of life and noise as it is to-day, and fuller of diversity of colour and costume. In this city Shakespeare passed his dramatic apprenticeship, ever hungry to see and to hear, learning his craft, making acquaintance, as he began to feel his feet under him, with the life of the town, comparing notes, it may be, with fellow-poets and fellow-adventurers whose names have long since sunk into oblivion, working at the odd jobs given him by the theatrical companies, dining at the ordinary of the taverns, gazing on courtly processions and spectacles, seeing new types of character and hearing new stories day by day. In the life of every artist there are certain golden years when the soul is pliable, years of exultant discovery and unfailing response to new impressions. Later in life, when self-assurance and stability have come with success, a man may keep all his energy, and may better his craftsmanship, or middle age would be a tedious mockery; but the magic of freshness and adventure is gone beyond recall. During these crucial years, when the world flows in upon the mind, Shakespeare's takings were enormous at Stratford and in London. We cannot trace the history of his experience; and Elizabethan society is known to us chiefly through his works, so that we are at a disadvantage if we try to check the picture by the original. In his plays he took a story from anywhere, and gave his characters Italian or French or Roman names. But for realism and vitality he was dependent on his observation of the life around him. Anachronism was nothing to him; verisimilitude everything. He did not travel to collect "local colour." One house-

hold is enough, says Juvenal, for him who wishes to study the habits of the human race; and Shakespeare was satisfied with the household of his own people. There are clocks in *Julius Caesar*; a paper-mill and printing in *Henry VI.*; Italian fashions in *Cymbeline*; indeed, except in the Roman plays, Shakespeare takes leave to fill in all the movement and detail of the play from his own world.

A few illustrations will serve to show how the incidents and characters of his plays were gathered from the life around him. Harrison, in the *Description of England* added to Holinshed's *Chronicles*, gives an exact account of the usual method of highway robberies. "Seldom," he says, "are any wayfaring men robbed without the consent of the chamberlain, tapster, or ostler where they bait and lie, who, feeling at their alighting whether their capcases or budgets be of any weight or not, do by-and-by give intimation to some one or other attendant daily in the yard or house, or dwelling hard by, whether the prey be worth the following or no. If it be for their turn, then the gentleman peradventure is asked which way he travelleth, and whether it please him to have another guest to bear him company at supper, who rideth the same way in the morning that he doth, or not. And thus if he admit him, or be glad of his acquaintance, the cheat is half wrought . . . And these are some of the policies of such shrews or close-booted gentlemen as lie in wait for fat booties by the highways, and which are most commonly practised in the winter season, about the feast of Christmas, when serving-men and unthrifty gentlemen want money to play at the dice and cards." This was the method of the famous robbery in *Henry IV.* In the dark inn-yard at Rochester Gadshill is found in earnest

conversation with the chamberlain of the inn, who tells him of the Kentish franklin and his three hundred marks in gold; while the unthrifty gentlemen (one of whom is fat, and grows old) lie in wait by the roadside till news is brought them by their faithful "setter."

In another passage of his book Harrison describes the dealings of persons of fashion with their tailor. "How curious, how nice also, are a number of men and women, and how hardly can the tailor please them in making it fit for their bodies! How many times must it be sent back again to him that made it! What chafing, what fretting, what reproachful language, doth the poor workman bear away!" Such was the fact as it was observed by William Harrison,—as it was observed also by William Shakespeare, and imaginatively presented, with all colloquial vivacity, in the scene between Petruchio and the tailor.

The character of Dogberry, says Aubrey, was studied from a live original. "The humour of the constable in a Midsummer's Night's Dream" (Aubrey was no sure guide among the plays) "he happened to take at Grendon in Bucks, which is the road from London to Stratford, and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxon." However this may be, that constable was living in many another place, and was adorned, not created, by Shakespeare's imagination. There is extant a letter, dated 1586, from Lord Burghley to Sir Francis Walsingham, complaining of the absurd behaviour of the persons appointed to arrest the conspirators in Babington's plot. Burghley tells how he was travelling from London to Theobalds in his coach, and noticed at every town's end some ten or twelve men standing conspicuously, in groups, armed with

long staves. They stood under penthouses, and he conceived them to be avoiding the rain, or waiting to drink at an alehouse. But coming upon a dozen at Enfield, where there was no rain, it occurred to him that these were the watchmen appointed to waylay and arrest the conspirators against the life of the Queen. "Thereupon," he says, "I called some of them to me apart, and asked them wherefore they stood there. And one of them answered, 'To take three young men' And demanding how they should know the persons, one answered with these words: 'Marry, my lord, by intelligence of their favour.' 'What mean you by that?' quoth I. 'Marry,' said they, 'one of the parties hath a hooked nose.' 'And have you,' quoth I, 'no other mark?' 'No,' saith they. And then I asked who appointed them; and they answered one Bankes, a Head Constable, whom I willed to be sent to me"

The tricks of the sharpers and thieves of London are minutely described by Greene in his inimitable pamphlets. *The Second Part of Conny-Catching* (1591) tells a story, newly reported to Greene while he was writing, of a trick put upon a country farmer, in the walks of St. Paul's, by a company of foists, or cut-purses. The farmer kept his hand in his pocket, and his purse in his hand, so that it was impossible to do any good with him, whether by jostling him, or claiming acquaintance and offering to shake him by the hand. Then two of the foists concocted a plan, and one of them "went to the farmer and walked directly before him, and next him, three or four turns: at last, standing still, he cried, 'Alas, honest man, help me, I am not well!' and with that sunk down suddenly in a swoon. The poor farmer, seeing a proper young gentleman, as he thought, fall dead

afore him, stepped to him, held him in his arms, rubbed him and chafed him; at this there gathered a great multitude of people about him; and the whilst the foist drew the farmer's purse and away." This is the identical trick put upon the clown by Autolycus, who, being a doctor of the mystery, scorns the aid of an accomplice, and carries out his purpose single-handed, with many refinements of humorous audacity.

Even Falstaff, though he is of Shakespeare's making, was not made out of nothing. It is vain and foolish to seek for a single original, whether in the dramatist, Henry Chettle, "sweating and blowing by reason of his fatness," or in any of his contemporaries. We may boldly say of Falstaff, as another of Shakespeare's highest creations says of himself, "There is no such man: it is impossible." So illimitable a body of vitality, steeped in so much wit, is not in Nature; and if it were, a great dramatist does not work in servile fashion from individual models. But Falstaff is pure Elizabethan; and here and there in the all too scanty human records of that time we meet with a comic exploit that seems to remind us of our old friend, or are caught by a trick of speech that comes to us with a strangely familiar ring. Falstaff was never at the end of his resources; and if he had chosen to inveigh against his own manner of life, not without some sidelong depreciation of his companions, might he not have spoken after this fashion: "Now, Lord! what a man is he; he was not ashamed, being a Gentleman, yea, a man of good years, and much authority, and the head Officer of a Duke's house, to play at Dice in an Ale house with boys, bawds and varlets. It had been a great fault to play at so vile a game among such vile persons, being no Gentleman, being no Officer, being not of such years; but being both a man of

fair lands, of an ancient house, of great authority, an Officer of a Duke, yea, and to such a Duke, and a man of such years that his white hairs should warn him to avoid all such folly, to play at such a game with such Roysters and such Varlets, yea, and that in such an house as none comes thither but Thieves, Bawds, and Ruffians; now before God, I cannot speak shame enough on him"? This speech, which is given as an example in Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* (1553), *has not Falstaff's wit, but it has the rhetorical syntax* which he borrows when he rides the high horse. And something of his wit, too, was to be found among the knights of the road. Thomas Harman, the Kentish Justice of the Peace, tells of an adventure that befell an old man, a tenant of his own, who was wont to go marketing twice a week to London. On one of these journeys this old man overtook two "rufflers," or broken soldiers of fortune who had taken to the highway, riding together quietly, the one carrying the other's cloak, like master and man. They talked pleasantly with him till they came to a lonely part of the road; then they led his horse into a wood and asked him how much money he had in his purse. He confessed that he had just seven shillings. But when the robbers came to search, they found, besides the seven shillings, an angel which the old man had charged his wife to keep safely for him, but she had forgotten it, and left it in his purse. Then the gentleman-thief began to bless himself, saying, "Good Lord, what a world is this! How may a man believe or trust in the same? See you not," quoth he, "this old knave told me that he had but seven shillings, and here is more by an angel. What an old knave and a false knave have we here," quoth this ruffler, "Our Lord have mercy on us, will this world never be better?"—and

with that they went their way. This speech is in the very vein of Falstaff; it was spoken near Shooter's Hill, in the neighbourhood of Blackheath, about 1560 A.D.

Illustrations of this kind are not beside the mark. Shakespeare lived in an age of glitter and pageantry, of squalor and wickedness, of the lust of the eye and the pride of life,—an age of prodigality, adventure, bravery, and excess. All this life has passed, leaving us a heap of dusty legal documents, and a small library of books, written, for the most part, by quiet students who took refuge in literature from the rush and turmoil of the age. We make much of the books, and patiently search them through and through for the genesis of Shakespeare's ideas. But the secret is not to be found among these deposits: the life that surrounded him has vanished; the stream of movement has ceased; and we are left raking for chance memorials in the dried and deserted channel.

The plays give abundant evidence of his knowledge of the town. Tavern-life counted for much in that day. At inns or taverns a newly arrived stranger would pick up his earliest acquaintance; and later, would meet the company of his friends. In *The Taming of the Shrew* the disguised pedant claims acquaintance with Baptista on the ground that twenty years agone they had been fellow-lodgers at the Pegasus in Genoa. The sea-captain in *Twelfth Night* lodges "in the south suburbs, at the Elephant." In *The Comedy of Errors* there are many inns—the Centaur, the Tiger, and the Porpentine. Of London taverns, the Boar's Head in East Cheap has been made famous for ever by the patronage of Falstaff and his crew; as the Mermaid was famous for the club of wits, established by Raleigh and Marlowe, honoured by Shakespeare, and superseded by the later gatherings in the Apollo room of

the Devil Tavern, where Ben Jonson presided. In that age of symbol and emblem private houses and shops bore a sign, which might either serve as a proper name, to identify the house, or might indicate the business of the tenant. Benedick, in *Much Ado*, speaks of the sign of blind Cupid "at the door of a brothel-house." An allusion to this sign enhances the force of King Lear's speech, when, in his terrible passion against the generation of mankind, he says to Gloucester, "Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid; I'll not love." *Measure for Measure*, and the Fourth Act of *Pericles* (which no pen but his could have written), prove Shakespeare's acquaintance with the darker side of the life of the town, as it might be seen in Pickt-hatch or the Bankside. He does not fear to expose the purest of his heroines to the breath of this infection; their virtue is not ignorance; "'tis in grain: 'twill endure wind and weather." In nothing is he more himself than in the little care that he takes to provide shelter for the most delicate characters of English fiction. They owe their education to the larger world, not to the drawing-room. Even Miranda, who is more tenderly guarded than Isabella or Marina, is not the pretty simpleton that some later renderings have made of her; when Prospero speaks of the usurping Duke as being no true brother to him, she replies composedly:

I should sin
To think but nobly of my grandmother:
Good wombs have borne bad sons.

Shakespeare's heroines are open-eyed; therein resembling himself, who turned away from nothing that bears the human image. He knew those "strong houses of sorrow," the prisons of London—as indeed they were easy to be known when Master Caper, or

any other ill-starred young man, might find himself inside one of them, at the instance of a usurer, "for a commodity of brown paper and old ginger." He marked the fashions of the youth; the gallants and military adventurers,

> Rash, inconsiderate, fiery voluntaries,
> With ladies' faces, and fierce dragons' spleens;

the demure and peace-loving young gentlemen, "lisping hawthorn-buds, that come like women in men's apparel, and smell like Bucklersbury in simple-time"; and those more hardened fortune-seekers who were waiting in the river-side resorts for a chance to put to sea, "that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere." He watched with gently critical humour the goings and comings of the "douce folk that lived by rule," the sober tradespeople of the City, who, with their wives and daughters, were puritanically given, and shunned the theatre. He touches on Puritanism, from time to time, with the lightest of hands, but not so lightly as to leave any room for mistake. This people, who sang psalms to hornpipe tunes, and were willing to make trading profits out of the theatre which they condemned, had no enemy in Shakespeare; but he knows them, and knows their besetting weaknesses, and smiles. Their preciseness of speech appears in Parolles, who, when he is told that his lord and master is married, answers with a pious reservation—"He is my good Lord; whom I serve above is my Master." The audience at the Globe Theatre in the suburb of the Bankside understood the allusion very well when the clown, in *Measure for Measure*, announces that all houses of ill repute in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down; as for those in the city, "they shall stand for seed:

they had gone down too, but that a wise burgher put in for them." From the high-priest of Baal, Master William Shakespeare, his precise brethren might have had that "schooling in the pleasures" which they most needed; they might have learnt that "though Honesty be no Puritan, yet it will do no hurt." But they denied themselves the opportunity.

After some years of life and work as an obscure adventurer, Shakespeare emerged from the ranks, and set his foot firmly on the ladder of fame. The great and immediate success of his *Venus and Adonis* (1593), which he dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, was in all likelihood the beginning of his good fortune. Plays had no patrons save the managers and the public; a poem, if it found acceptance, might win for its author admission to the society of men of rank and influence Not long after this we hear of Shakespeare acting at Greenwich Palace before the Queen; and thenceforward he probably found easy access to the highest courtly circles, and observed them as closely as he had observed the life of the streets. He sees the problem of government from many points of view, but most readily and habitually from the point of view of the ruling classes. Royalty was gracious to him. Ben Jonson speaks of

> those flights upon the banks of Thames,
> That so did take Eliza and our James ,

and there are many indications and traditions of the favour that he enjoyed under both monarchs. He did not disdain to play the courtier. He celebrated the praises of both his sovereigns, choosing for commendation those gifts and graces on which they most prided themselves. Elizabeth is praised for her virgin estate; James for his supernatural powers of healing, and

his strange gift of prophecy. *The Merry Wives* was written out of compliment to the one; the subject of *Macbeth* was probably chosen to gratify the other. Of the nobility, we may infer that Shakespeare was in friendly personal relations with Southampton, who is said to have given him a thousand pounds "to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to"; with Essex, who is lauded in *Henry V.*; and with the "incomparable pair of brethren," William, Earl of Pembroke, and Philip, Earl of Montgomery, to whom the First Folio is dedicated in recognition of the favour they had shown to the author when living. Some of the plays —*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII.*—were obviously performed on special courtly occasions; those that include a masque could not have been presented with due elaboration on the public stage. All that we know testifies to Shakespeare's familiarity with the life of the Court; he had been present at state ceremonies, when great clerks greeted Royalty with premeditated welcomes, which broke down under the weight of the occasion; he delighted in that quickness of witty retort which was cultivated in courtly speech, and in that graciousness and urbanity of bearing which is sometimes found in his princely men, and always in his great ladies. In *Love's Labour's Lost* the Princess, and the Princess alone, is considerate and kindly to "poor Maccabaeus" and "brave Hector"; in *Twelfth Night* the Countess Olivia treats her drunken kinsman and his foolish friend with a certain charming protective care, and attends to Malvolio's wrongs before quietly accepting, for herself, the hand of Sebastian.

Of the incidents of his life in London nothing is known. One anecdote, belonging to the earlier years

of that life, is recorded—just such an anecdote as young law-students might be expected to tell of a popular actor-manager, and not deserving repetition, were it not the single piece of gossip concerning Shakespeare which was set down on paper during his residence in London and has survived. The *Diary* of John Manningham, barrister-at-law, tells, under the year 1601, how, once upon a time, a City dame, infatuated with Burbage in the part of Richard III., made an assignation with him for the evening. Shakespeare, overhearing their conversation, was beforehand with Burbage, and was kindly entertained. "Then message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third." Of a quarter of a century of life and experience this one small doubtful jest is all that has been chronicled; and *Hamlet* may point the moral.

From the evidence of the plays it has been argued that Shakespeare must have travelled. Doubtless he often went with his company of actors on their summer tours among provincial towns. It is unlikely that he ever crossed the Channel, or visited Scotland. Certain of his allusions, in *Hamlet* and the Italian plays, show some detailed local knowledge of Elsinore and of Italy. The name Gobbo, for instance, which he gives to the clown in *The Merchant of Venice*, is the name of an ancient stone in the market-place of that city; and when he speaks of the common ferry as "the tranect," the word seems to be a mistaken or misprinted adaptation of the Italian word *traghetto*. But this is nothing: Venice, in her ancient glory, attracted crowds of travellers; and, without troubling himself to put a *question*, Shakespeare must have heard innumerable stories and memories from that

centre of life and commerce. In this age of cheap printed information we are too apt to forget how large a part of his knowledge he must have gathered in talk. Books were licensed and guarded; but in talk there was free trade. He must often have listened to tales, like those told by Othello, of the wonders of the New World. He must often have seen the affected traveller, described in *King John*, dallying with his tooth-pick at a great man's table, full of elaborate compliment,

> And talking of the Alps and Apennines,
> The Pyrenean and the river Po.

The knowledge that he gained from such talk, if it was sometimes remote and curious, was neither systematic nor accurate; and this is the knowledge reflected in the plays.

Through all the years of his strenuous life in London his affections were still constant to the place of his birth, which seems to have remained the home of his family. When money came to him, it was spent on acquiring property at Stratford. In 1597 he bought and repaired New Place, the stateliest house in the town, and to this he added from time to time by large purchases of arable land, pasture land, and tithes. "He was wont," says Aubrey, "to go to his native country once a year." "He frequented the plays all his younger time," says Ward, "but in his elder days lived at Stratford, and supplied the stage with two plays every year, and for that had an allowance so large that he spent at the rate of a thousand a year, as I have heard." For many years before he retired he was probably much at Stratford, and his greatest plays, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and others, were probably written during the summer

season at New Place, as they were certainly acted on the boards of the Globe Theatre in Southwark. The parish register of Stratford has preserved for us the record of some of the chief events of his private life. In 1596 his only son, Hamnet, died; and those who seek in the plays for a reflection of his personal history are perhaps justified in finding some shadow of his sorrow expressed in the pathetic fate of Arthur and the passionate grief of Constance, in *King John*. In 1607 his eldest daughter, Susanna, was married to John Hall, a doctor of medicine; in the following year his mother died. During the last three or four years of his life he is reported to have lived wholly at Stratford, in retirement; on the 10th of February, 1616, his daughter Judith was married to Thomas Quiney, vintner; on the 25th of March he signed his will; on the 23rd of April he died, and was buried in the chancel of Stratford Church.

His will makes a fairly regular and normal disposition of his property among his family and kinsfolk. The only professional friends mentioned are his "fellows," John Heminge, Richard Burbage, and Henry Condell, who receive twenty-six shillings and eightpence apiece to buy them rings Of these Richard Burbage was the actor of the great tragic parts in the plays; the other two were subsequently the editors of the first collected edition. The affectionate bequest to them in the will, taken in connection with their own statements in the preface to the Folio of 1623, gives them high authority as editors; even though their work is deformed, in parts, by serious blunders. A legitimate inference from the recorded facts, and from the strangely varying merits of the texts of the several plays, as printed in the Folio, is that Shakespeare before his death had begun to make preparations for

a collected edition. Some few plays he probably had by him in autograph; some he had scored and corrected on playhouse transcripts or on the faulty quarto copies which had been printed during his lifetime; many others had received no revision at his hands. The collection of his dramatic "papers," such as it was, passed into the care of Heminge and Condell; and they discharged their trust. Where the Folio differs materially from earlier quarto versions, the taste of modern editors may prefer the one or the other, but there can be no question which comes to us with the higher authority. The earlier editions preserve many passages, undoubtedly by Shakespeare, which are omitted in the Folio; but Shakespeare was first of all a playwright, and the omissions often improve the play. Most modern editions include all the matter which was omitted in the Folio, and retain all the matter which made its first appearance there. This plan has advantages, especially for those who make use of Shakespeare's work as a lexicon of speeches and sentiments. But it has one grave disadvantage: it presents us with some of the plays in a form which was not, and cannot have been, authorised by Shakespeare at any time in his career. There is no escape from the Folio: for twenty of the plays it is our sole authority; for most of the remainder it is the best authority that we shall ever know.

In the latest plays the country life of Stratford reasserts itself. After all our martial and political adventures, our long-drawn passions and deadly sorrows, we are back in Perdita's flower-garden, and join in the festivities of a sheep-shearing. A new type of character meets us in these plays; a girl, innocent, frank, dutiful, and wise, cherished and watched over by her devoted father, or restored to him

after long separation. It is impossible to escape the thought that we are indebted to Judith Shakespeare for something of the beauty and simplicity which appear in Miranda and Perdita, and in the earlier sketch of Marina. In his will Shakespeare bequeaths to Judith a "broad silver-gilt bowl,"—doubtless the bride-cup that was used at her wedding. There were many other girls within reach of his observation, but (such are the limitations of humanity) there were few so likely as his own daughter to exercise him in disinterested sympathy and insight, or to touch him with a sense of the pathos of youth.

These speculations may very easily be carried too far; and they bring with them this danger, that prosaic minds take them for a key to the plays, and translate the most exquisite works of imagination into dull chronicles and gossip. Perhaps we do best to abide by the bare facts, and the straightforward tale that they tell. So great is the power of Shakespeare's name to stimulate unbridled curiosity that whole volumes have been filled with the discussion of questions which, even if he were now alive, we could not answer. What was his religious creed? He was baptized, and had his children baptized, according to the rites of the Church of England. Was he happily married? If he had lived in a town of a hundred newspapers, all treasured and consulted, there would still be no evidence to satisfy us on this point. The broad outlines of his life are not obscure. He went to London to seek his fortune, and when he had found it there, returned to Stratford, and established himself with his wife and family in peace and prosperity. It is as simple as a fairy-tale. If we must needs look closer, and read the plays into the life, there is nothing to alter in the story. We kno

that he went through deep waters, no man deeper, and came out on the other side. The simple pieties of life were at all times dearest to him. He was never uprooted from the place of his nativity, nor deceived by the spirits of his own raising. His attachment to his birthplace, his family, and his early friends might be fairly expressed in the subtle metaphor of the greatest of his younger contemporaries—a metaphor in which he would have found nothing extravagant or absurd. The vast circle of his experience was kept true by the stability of his first affections, as the motion of a pair of compasses is controlled from the fixed centre.

> Such wilt thou be to me, who must
> Like th' other foot obliquely run.
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end where I begun.

CHAPTER III

BOOKS AND POETRY

It is safe to assert that Shakespeare was a poet before he was a dramatist. Of his first steps in the practice of poetry nothing is known; but the study of his plays and poems has thrown some light on his dealings with literature. Books served him in two ways; as a mine, and as a school: he lifted from them the tales that he rehandled, and he learned from them some part of his poetic and dramatic method.

His literary sources have been so carefully identified and so exhaustively studied, that it is possible to make a long catalogue of the books that he read or consulted. The slow-footed and painstaking pursuit of him by the critics through ways that he trod so carelessly and lightly would furnish a happy theme for his own wit and irony. The world lay open to him, and he had small patience with the tedious processes of minute culture. He was a hungry and rapid reader; and has expressed, with something of a witty young man's intolerance, his contempt for more laborious methods:

> Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
> That will not be deep-search'd with saucy looks;
> Small have continual plodders ever won
> Save base authority from others' books.

In Stratford he can have had no great choice of books, though we may assume that he read most of those he

could lay his hands on. There is extant a private account-book containing an inventory of the furniture and books belonging to Sir William More, of Loseley, in the last year of the reign of Queen Mary, some seven years before Shakespeare was born. This list has nothing to do with Shakespeare, but it serves to show what books were to be found in the library of a country gentleman of literary tastes and easy, though not ample, means. There is a selection of the Latin classics, including works by Ovid, Horace, Juvenal, Suetonius, Apuleius, and a volume of extracts from Terence. Cicero's Offices, and Thucydides, occur in the English translations of Whittington and Nicolls. In Italian there are Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavel, and the Book of the Courtier. Mediæval literature is represented by the Golden Legend, Albertus De Secretis, and Cato's Precepts; the Revival of Learning by More (the Utopia), Erasmus (the Adages and the Praise of Folly), and Marcellus Palingenius. There is a fair number of Chronicles, including Higden, Fabyan, Harding, and Froissart. The English list includes works by Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, John Heywood, Skelton, Alexander Barclay, and a liberal allowance of books of Songs, Proverbs, Fables, and Ballads. An English Bible, copies of the New Testament in Latin, French, and Italian, Elyot's Latin Dictionary, an Italian Dictionary, some books on law, physic, and land-surveying, "a book of the Turk," and "a treatise of the newe India," make up the list. Last, and never to be forgotten in estimating the poetic influences of the time, in the parlour there was a pair of virginals, a lute, and a gittern. This is a richer collection of books than Shakespeare was likely to find in Stratford, and it

is noticeable that, except the Latin poets whom he read at school, none of the authors occurring in the above list influenced him in any marked fashion. He was a child of the English Renaissance, and it was the books of his own age that first caught him in their toils. Even Chaucer, who never lost popularity, lost esteem with the younger generation of Elizabethans, and suffered from the imputation of rusticity. But the translations and imitations of the classics, which poured from the press during the second half of the century, the poems and love-pamphlets and plays of the University wits, the tracts and dialogues in the prevailing Italian taste—all these were the making of the new age and the favourite reading of Shakespeare, who can hardly have become intimate with them until he first set foot in London. No doubt he ranged up and down the bookstalls of Paul's Churchyard, browsing among "the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardles of printed pamphlets" wherewith, according to a contemporary, "this Country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished." Here for a few shillings he may have bought books printed by Caxton and his pupils, and so made acquaintance with Gower, whom he read, and with Malory, some of whose phrases he seems to echo Here, no doubt, he tore the heart, at a single reading, out of many a pamphlet and many a novel. He was no bibliophile, though he gives utterance, with curious frequency, to the opinion that a good book should have a good binding. He read the works of his contemporaries as they appeared. Marlowe, his master in the drama, he has honoured in the most unusual fashion by direct quotation:

> Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might:
> "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

From Greene's story of Dorastus and Fawnia he took the plot of *The Winter's Tale*; and it is permissible to think that he commemorated the unhappy life and early death of Greene, who had died reviling him, in those lines of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which describe

> The thrice three Muses, mourning for the death
> Of Learning late deceas'd in beggary.

On Thomas Lodge's novel *Rosalynde* he based his play of *As You Like It*. He read *Euphues*, of course; borrowed from it, and in *Henry IV.* ridiculed its affectations. He read Sidney's *Arcadia*, and perhaps took from it the underplot of Gloucester and his sons in *King Lear*. And apart from these famous instances, there is hardly a pamphlet, in that age of pamphlets, which the student can read in the certainty that Shakespeare has not been before him. The names of the devils in *King Lear* seem to be borrowed from an obscure Protestant tract, of 1603, called *A Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures*. The arguments of Shylock, in his speeches before the Duke, have been supposed to owe something to Silvayn's *Orator*, a book of declamations translated in 1596 from the French; while a very close parallel to Portia's reply has been found in the prose of Seneca. These are instances which might be multiplied a hundredfold; and although few are certain cases of debt, their cumulative effect is irresistible. Shakespeare was one of those swift and masterly readers who know what they want of a book; they scorn nothing that is dressed in print, but turn over the pages with a quick discernment of all that brings them new information, or jumps with their thought, or tickles their fancy. Such a reader will perhaps have done with a volume in a few minutes, yet

what he has taken from it he keeps for years. He is a live man; and is sometimes wrongly judged by slower wits to be a learned man.

Among the publications of his own age, some few stand out pre-eminent as books that were of more than passing interest to Shakespeare, books that he ransacked from cover to cover for the material of his plays. The books that served him best for his dramatic plots were Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, and the Italian novelists, in many translations, chief among which must be reckoned Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, containing a selection of the choicest novels of the great Italian masters. These books, one would say, he must have owned. The novelists supplied him, either directly, or through the medium of some earlier play, with much of the material of his comedy. From Holinshed he took the substance of his English historical plays; and his study of the book acquainted him also with those ancient British legends which he transfigured in *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*. The Italian novels and the English chronicle history cannot compare, in the world's literature, with the thrice-renowned Lives of Plutarch, yet all three were worthy to be read and studied by Shakespeare.

An examination of the use that he makes of these, his principal sources, shows that he did not pay the same measure of respect to them all. The novels he treats with the utmost freedom, altering them, or adding to them, to suit his fancy. He brings them out of the languid realm of romance by inventing new realistic characters, who give something of the diversity of life to the story, and save it from swooning into sheer convention. Orlando and Rosalind must run the gauntlet of criticism at the hands of

Touchstone and Jaques; the love-affair of Romeo and Juliet is seen in its more prosaic aspects through the eyes of Mercutio and the Nurse. In the interests of comedy he does away with much of the pain and squalor of his originals. In Greene's novel Bellaria, the original of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, dies; in Shakespeare's play she is kept alive, by strange means, for the final reconciliation. In *Twelfth Night*, again, the story, as it is told by Barnabe Riche, from whose novel of *Apollonius and Silla* Shakespeare seems to have taken the main incidents of the play, has in it strong elements of pain and tragedy. Viola, in Riche's story, has been wronged and deserted by the Duke; Olivia, in the course of the intrigue, is betrayed by Sebastian. These ugly features of the story were altered by Shakespeare; and the result is a pure comedy of fancy, a world of romantic incident seen through a golden haze of love and mirth. So he moulded a story to his liking, turning it, as seemed good to his mood and judgment, into tragedy, or comedy, or romance. In the plays that deal with English history he was compelled to keep closer to his sources; but he was fortunate in the authors that he used. The Chronicles of Holinshed, unlike more modern histories, are dramatic in essence; they leave constitutional problems on one side and make the most of striking events and characters. The very title-page of Hall's Chronicle is a fair enough description of Shakespeare's theme: "The Union of the two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York, being long in continual dissension for the crown of this noble realm, with all the acts done in both the times of the princes both of the one lineage and of the other, beginning at the time of King Henry the Fourth, the first author of this division, and so

successively proceeding to the reign of the high and prudent prince King Henry the Eight, the undubitate flower and very heir of both the said lineages." That irony of kingship, which Mr. Pater conceives it is Shakespeare's main purpose to set forth, is already present in the mind of the prose chronicler, who thus comments on the fate of King Richard II.: "What trust is in this world, what surety man hath of his life, and what constancy is in the unstable commonalty, all men may apparently perceive by the ruin of this noble prince, which being an undubitate king, crowned and anointed by the spiritualty, honoured and exalted by the nobility, obeyed and worshipped of the common people, was suddenly deceived by them which he most trusted, betrayed by them whom he had preferred, and slain by them whom he had brought up and nourished so that all men may perceive and see that fortune weigheth princes and poor men all in one balance." Sometimes Shakespeare follows his authority so tamely that he versifies whole speeches from the chronicler, working, as it would seem, with the book open before him. The discussion on the Salic Law in *Henry V.*, and the long dialogue between Malcolm and Macduff, in the Fourth Act of *Macbeth*, are taken directly from Holinshed, and are very imperfectly dramatised. It is to passages like these that Dryden alludes when he speaks of Shakespeare falling "into a carelessness, and, as I may call it, a lethargy of thought, for whole scenes together." But when a crisis calls for treatment, when his imagination takes fire, or his sense of humour is touched, he gives over borrowing, and coins from his own mint. Every word spoken by Falstaff is a word of life, for Falstaff was unknown to the chroniclers. The character of Lady Macbeth is represented in Holinshed by a single

sentence: "But specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a Queen." From this bare hint Shakespeare created his murderess, her narrow practical intensity, her heroic courage and fierce will, holding imagination at bay, soothing and supporting her husband, making light of the deed to be done, until human nature avenges itself on her, and she too falls a victim to air-drawn fancies, and hears voices in her sleep. The most famous of the freedoms taken with Holinshed is to be found in *King Lear*. In the chronicle version Cordelia survives her misfortunes, regains her kingdom, and comforts the declining years of her father; but before Shakespeare reached the close of his play he had wound the tragedy up to such a pitch that a happy ending, as it is called, was unthinkable; a deeper peace than the peace of old age by the fireside was needed to compose that heartrending storm of passion. In this as in other cases Holinshed was used by Shakespeare as a kind of mechanical aid to start his imagination on its flight and launch it into its own domain.

With Plutarch the case is far different. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* was the only supremely great literary work which Shakespeare set himself to fashion into drama. There are a hundred testimonies to the power and influence of this book of the ages. It has been the breviary of soldiers, statesmen, and orators, and has fascinated readers so diverse as Henry of Navarre and Miss Hannah More. In Plutarch Shakespeare found some of the most superb passages of the history of the world, great deeds nobly narrated, and great characters worthily drawn. Moreover, his material was already more than half shaped

to his hand, for Plutarch writes lives, not annals, and pays more attention to the character of men, even in its humblest manifestations, than to the general and philosophic causes of events. "They who write lives," says Montaigne, "by reason that they take more notice of counsels than events, more of what proceeds from within doors than of what happens without, are the fittest for my perusal; and therefore, of all others, Plutarch is the man for me." Plutarch was the man for Shakespeare, and in Plutarch alone he sometimes met his match. Some of the finest pieces of eloquence in the Roman plays are merely Sir Thomas North's splendid prose strung into blank verse. Shakespeare follows his authority phrase by phrase and word by word, not, as with Holinshed, because his interest flagged, but because he knew when to let well alone. It may even be said that in some places he has fallen short of his original. There is a passage in Plutarch's Life of Antony, tremulous with suspense and dim forebodings, wherein is described how the god Hercules, on the night before the last surrender, forsook the cause of Antony. "The self-same night within little of midnight, when all the city was quiet, full of fear and sorrow, thinking what would be the issue and end of this war: it is said that suddenly they heard a marvellous sweet harmony of sundry sorts of instruments of music, with the cry of a multitude of people, as they had been dancing, and had sung as they use in Bacchus' feasts, with movings and turnings after the manner of the Satyrs: and it seemed that this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troop, that made this noise they heard, went out of the city at that gate. Now such as in reason sought the depth of the interpretation of this wonder, thought that it

sentence: "But specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a Queen." From this bare hint Shakespeare created his murderess, her narrow practical intensity, her heroic courage and fierce will, holding imagination at bay, soothing and supporting her husband, making light of the deed to be done, until human nature avenges itself on her, and she too falls a victim to air-drawn fancies, and hears voices in her sleep. The most famous of the freedoms taken with Holinshed is to be found in *King Lear*. In the chronicle version Cordelia survives her misfortunes, regains her kingdom, and comforts the declining years of her father; but before Shakespeare reached the close of his play he had wound the tragedy up to such a pitch that a happy ending, as it is called, was unthinkable; a deeper peace than the peace of old age by the fireside was needed to compose that heartrending storm of passion. In this as in other cases Holinshed was used by Shakespeare as a kind of mechanical aid to start his imagination on its flight and launch it into its own domain.

With Plutarch the case is far different. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* was the only supremely great literary work which Shakespeare set himself to fashion into drama. There are a hundred testimonies to the power and influence of this book of the ages. It has been the breviary of soldiers, statesmen, and orators, and has fascinated readers so diverse as Henry of Navarre and Miss Hannah More. In Plutarch Shakespeare found some of the most superb passages of the history of the world, great deeds nobly narrated, and great characters worthily drawn. Moreover, his material was already more than half shaped

to his hand, for Plutarch writes lives, not annals, and pays more attention to the character of men, even in its humblest manifestations, than to the general and philosophic causes of events. "They who write lives," says Montaigne, "by reason that they take more notice of counsels than events, more of what proceeds from within doors than of what happens without, are the fittest for my perusal; and therefore, of all others, Plutarch is the man for me." Plutarch was the man for Shakespeare, and in Plutarch alone he sometimes met his match. Some of the finest pieces of eloquence in the Roman plays are merely Sir Thomas North's splendid prose strung into blank verse. Shakespeare follows his authority phrase by phrase and word by word, not, as with Holinshed, because his interest flagged, but because he knew when to let well alone. It may even be said that in some places he has fallen short of his original. There is a passage in Plutarch's Life of Antony, tremulous with suspense and dim forebodings, wherein is described how the god Hercules, on the night before the last surrender, forsook the cause of Antony. "The self-same night within little of midnight, when all the city was quiet, full of fear and sorrow, thinking what would be the issue and end of this war: it is said that suddenly they heard a marvellous sweet harmony of sundry sorts of instruments of music, with the cry of a multitude of people, as they had been dancing, and had sung as they use in Bacchus' feasts, with movings and turnings after the manner of the Satyrs: and it seemed that this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troop, that made this noise they heard, went out of the city at that gate. Now such as in reason sought the depth of the interpretation of this wonder, thought that it

was the god unto whom Antonius bare singular devotion, to counterfeit and resemble him, that did forsake them." Shakespeare desired to preserve this effect; and in the Fourth Act of *Antony and Cleopatra* he introduces a music of hautboys under the stage, and makes the sentries discuss its meaning. But this is a poor substitute for Plutarch's description. The death of Cleopatra, again, as it is described in Plutarch, is a combination of the intensity and minuteness of realism with the dignity and reserve of the best classic art. "Her death was very sudden. For those whom Caesar sent unto her ran thither in all haste possible, and found the soldiers standing at the gate, mistrusting nothing nor understanding of her death. But when they opened the doors, they found Cleopatra stark dead, laid upon a bed of gold, attired and arrayed in her royal robes, and one of her two women, which was called Iras, dead at her feet; and the other woman, called Charmian, half dead, and trembling, trimming the diadem which Cleopatra ware upon her head. One of the soldiers seeing her angrily said unto her: 'Is that well done, Charmian?' 'Very well,' said she again, 'and meet for a Princess descended from the race of so many noble Kings.' She said no more, but fell down dead, hard by the bed." Here the drama falls short; perhaps because so much of the effect of the narrative depends on those moving little touches of description—the unconscious sentries, the trembling handmaiden—which must perforce be omitted in the drama, or expressed in a more trivial and coarser fashion by the gestures of the players.

There is evidence to show how strong a hold the stories and characters of Plutarch laid upon Shakespeare's imagination. He must have searched the book carefully for tragic subjects during the last

years of the sixteenth century, some time before he wrote *Julius Caesar*. From that time onward memories of his reading constantly recur to him, and intrude upon his other plays. When Horatio reminds the companions of his watch how

> In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
> The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
> Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets,

the Danish courtier is borrowing his history from Plutarch. When Banquo, on the sudden disappearance of the witches, exclaims—

> Were such things here as we do speak about,
> Or have we eaten on the insane root,
> That takes the reason prisoner?

the Scottish thane is remembering his Plutarch. Botanists have, as usual, given their cheerful help to determine the name of the insane root. Their opinions would have enlightened Shakespeare, for the fact is that he did not know its name. There lingered in his memory a passage from Plutarch's Life of Antony describing how the Roman soldiers in the Parthian war were forced by hunger "to taste of roots that were never eaten before, among the which there was one that killed them, and made them out of their wits." In *Cymbeline* the bed-chamber of Imogen is hung with tapestry representing the picture of

> Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman,
> And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for
> The press of boats, or pride.

And the very subject of *Timon of Athens* was probably suggested by the short description of Timon which is

given in the Life of Antony. North's Plutarch did more than supply Shakespeare with matter for his plays; it excited his imagination and possessed his thought.

The question of his Biblical knowledge has been discussed in many treatises, and involved in a network of wire-drawn arguments. Some critics have maintained that his reading was in the Bishops' Bible; others hold for the Genevan version. Both succeed in establishing their case; indeed, it would be strange if he had not known something of both versions. The Bishops' Bible was read in the churches; the Genevan Bible was more widely circulated in portable editions. He has references to Pilate washing his hands; to the Prodigal Son, to Jacob and Laban, to Lazarus and Dives, and the like. But it cannot be inferred from this that he was a deep student of the Bible. The phraseology of his age, like that of later ages, was saturated with Biblical reminiscence. The *Essays of Elia* are a tissue of Biblical phrase; and Shakespeare's knowledge of the Bible, which may fairly be likened to Charles Lamb's, was probably acquired in casual and desultory fashion.

Of modern French and Italian writers it is clear that those whom he knew best he knew in translation. From the plays it may be gathered that he had a certain colloquial knowledge of French, and, at the least, a smattering of Italian. The plots of *Measure for Measure* and *Othello* are taken from the *Hecatommithi*, a collection of Italian novels, published in 1566, by Giambattista Giraldi, commonly called Cinthio. The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* is taken, in the main, from another collection called *Il Pecorone*, by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino. The *Measure for Measure* story had already been dramatised by George Whetstone under the title

of *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), and there are traces of an earlier dramatic handling of the *Merchant of Venice* story, in a lost play called *The Jew*. But no intermediate form has been found for the *Othello* story; which therefore remains the chief argument for Shakespeare's direct use of Italian authors. A man of less than his ability could learn in a few weeks enough Italian for a purpose like this, so that no great significance attaches to the discussion. He was not influenced by the works of Machiavel, as Marlowe was; nor by those of Pietro Aretino, as Nashe was. An incident taken from Ariosto, whom Spenser knew so well, occurs in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but there is no reason to suppose that he went further for it than Sir John Harington's translation of 1591. If he had studied Ariosto, we might expect to find more numerous and intimate marks of acquaintance, and the same argument applies to Rabelais. There are substances which have the property of igniting each other and the fact that they never did is proof enough that they never came into contact. Celia's allusion, in *As You Like It*, to the size of Gargantua's mouth is plainly a reminiscence of a lost Elizabethan chapbook which gave to English readers the shell of Rabelais' fable without the vivifying soul, and some few Rabelaisian turns of speech, which are found on the lips of Iago and others, even if they are original in Rabelais, probably came borne to Shakespeare upon the tide of talk. He was well acquainted, through the translation of Florio, with Montaigne, that other great pioneer of the modern spirit. It has been argued that a certain deeper vein of scepticism and questioning, which makes its appearance in his mature tragic work, was borrowed from Montaigne. Certainly it would not be difficult to gather from Montaigne's

Essays an anthology of passages which speak with the very voice of Hamlet; but the similarity seems to spring from the natural kinship of questioning minds. "Man has nothing properly his own," says Montaigne, "but the use of his opinions"; and Hamlet echoes the thought. It is not likely that Shakespeare was dependent for so ancient a discovery on the labours of Florio. Was the widow, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, a pupil of Montaigne's? In her raillery of Petruchio she utters the text upon which Montaigne's work may be said to be one long commentary: "He that is giddy thinks the world turns round." Was Biron indebted to Montaigne? He teaches the same doctrine when he remarks that "every man with his affects is born." The only passage of importance which Shakespeare certainly borrowed directly from Montaigne bears no witness to discipleship in thought. In his essay *Of Cannibals* Montaigne gravely argues for the superiority of the savage state, and drives the argument to its full conclusion; in *The Tempest* Shakespeare borrows the description of the unsophisticated commonwealth, and plays with the idea only to ridicule it. Their differences are absolute: Montaigne is at ease, not to say exultant, in his doubt; his business is to spy out human weaknesses and to put all human life to the question: Shakespeare does not withhold the question, but his eye and heart are at a mortal war, and in the end the gentlemen of the inquisition find that he belongs to the other party. His ultimate sympathies are with human frailty, human simplicity, human unreason; and it is to these that he gives the last word. He has, what Montaigne shows no trace of, a capacity for tragic thought.

The careful study of Shakespeare's sources, though it throws some light on his dramatic methods, does

not bring us much nearer to the heart of the matter. Its results are mainly negative. The stress of our interpretation must not be laid upon those parts of his story which he borrowed from others and preserved unaltered. What he added to the story was himself; and a comparison of what he found with what he left forces us to the conclusion that his choice of books was largely accidental. If these had not come to his hand, others would have served as well. Subjects fit for his uses lay all around him. He read Holinshed, and happened on the stories of King Lear and Macbeth. There is nothing in these stories, as he found them, to awaken more than a languid interest. He could have made as good a tragedy of the story of Bluebeard—and the English critics would have suspected him of a covert reference to Leicester. He could have made an enthralling romance of the story of Cinderella—and the German critics would have found the inner meaning of the play in the Kantian doctrine of time. The craft and experience which were the making of the plays are not taken from the books. Plutarch stands alone; partly because in Plutarch, at a time when his interest was attracted to politics, he found the best political handbook in the world; and not less because Plutarch was near enough to the crisis of Roman history to catch a measure of the thrilling and convincing quality of things seen and heard.

The literature which influenced Shakespeare most habitually, and left its mark everywhere on his plays, is literature of another kind—a kind which is hardly entitled to the formal dignity of the name, and may perhaps be more truly considered as an aspect of social life. His plays are extraordinarily rich in the floating debris of popular literature—scraps and tags

and broken ends of a whole world of songs and ballads and romances and proverbs. In this respect he is notable even among his contemporaries; few of them can match him in the wealth that he caught out of the air or picked up by the roadside. Edgar and Iago, Petruchio and Benedick, Sir Toby and Pistol, the Fool in *Lear* and the Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, even Ophelia and Desdemona, are all alike singers of old songs, which are introduced not idly, to fill up the time or entertain the audience, but dramatically, to help the situation. From the Comedies alone a fair collection of proverbs might be gathered. Who said "Blessing of your heart, you brew good ale"? What dramatic situations suggested the following—"Still swine eats all the draff"; "God sends a curst cow short horns"; "You have the grace of God, Sir, and he hath enough"; "Thus must I from the smoke into the smother"; "Black men are pearls in ladies' eyes"; "There's small choice in rotten apples"? These were reminiscences of a humble kind, all the fitter for the purposes of a dramatist in that they were not stolen from books, but plucked out of life, where they never lack the aid of a vivid dramatic setting.

There is thus no difficulty in crediting Shakespeare with ample opportunities for acquiring the stock-in-trade of a playwright. The strange thing, or the thing made by our ignorance to seem strange, is that his earliest published works reveal him in a character wholly undramatic, as an elegiac narrative poet of the polite school. No biography, however well-informed and minute, can lay bare the processes of a poet's initiation in his craft, which are in their nature far more obscure than the history of his life and opinions. His education in the use of his native tongue, and in the appreciation of its beauties and

cadences, begins at his birth, and is far advanced long before biography can lay hold of him. We are content to believe that the poetic impulse was imparted to Cowley, and to Keats, instantaneously, by the chance reading of Spenser. We must be content with less knowledge of Shakespeare's beginnings. The song and dance and music of that age of licensed hilarity certainly did not leave Stratford unvisited. The more elaborate kinds of poetry, ennobled by a recognised ancestry, belonged to a single stock, and haunted courtly and metropolitan circles. It was at the Court of Anne Boleyn that the poetry of the sixteenth century was born; it was the cousin of Anne Boleyn, the Earl of Surrey, who became the master of all sonneteering lovers and all new-fangled writers of blank verse. The strength of the school of Surrey lay in its songs, which never miss the essentials of verse that is to be wedded to music. Even the dullest of the poets of that school understands a lyrical movement, while the best of them can breathe such strains as Wyatt's ravishing song, with the burden "My lute, be still, for I have done," or Gascoigne's beautiful Lullaby. But the school was unlucky even in its cradle Protestant psalmody, which was born in the same Court, and countenanced by the same kingly favour, took possession of its simpler measures and degraded them to doggerel for the use of the populace. The Psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins commanded a far larger audience than the courtly poets, and shaped the national prosody for almost half a century. The monotonous emphasis of the universal "poulter's measure," with its shorter and longer swing, as of a rocking-horse, made delicacy of diction impossible; and the only resource left to the oppressed poets was to double the monotony by a free use of alliteration.

From the tyranny of this metre the country was delivered by the pens of the University wits. They maintained the lyrical tradition in all its fulness; for the other purposes of poetry they abandoned the hobbling measures of Sternhold and Hopkins, Phaer and Twyne, and reverted to the old ten-syllable metre, which they rescued from the hands of pedants, and inspired with a various and subtle melody. In the form of blank verse Marlowe proved its declamatory and dramatic powers; in stanza form Peele and Greene and Lodge and the poets of the Song-books gave it a new fluidity and sweetness, which sometimes ripples into lyric, sometimes sinks again into the quiet cadences of deliberate speech. The reform of verse was accompanied and stimulated, as it always is, by a sudden enrichment of the matter which verse is shaped to express. Even in England, the poetry of the Renaissance ceased, for a time, to concern itself with man as a being under authority, begirt with duties and responsibilities, and doomed to old age and death; it turned from the consideration of magistrates and husbandmen to feast its eyes on that naked and primal world revealed by the classical mythology, where passion ran free, restrained by no law save the law of beauty. The revival of classical myth, which in ordinary court circles was no more than a fashionable craze, or a fresh opportunity for the tailor, to Marlowe and his fellows was a new interpretation of life and a new warrant given to desire. These poets, and their master Ovid, were the masters of Shakespeare; when he graduated in poetry it was in this school; and it is not easy to see how the new poetic impulse could have come to him in Stratford.

Venus and Adonis and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which were published in 1593 and the following year, are,

first of all, works of art. They are poetic exercises by one who has set himself to prove his craftsmanship upon a given subject. If traces of the prentice hand are visible, it is not in any uncertainty of execution, nor in any failure to achieve an absolute beauty, but rather in the very ostentation of artistic skill. There is no remission, at any point, from the sense of conscious art. The poems are as delicate as carved ivory, and as bright as burnished silver. They deal with disappointment, crime, passion, and tragedy, yet are destitute of feeling for the human situation, and are, in effect, painless. This painlessness, which made Hazlitt compare them to a couple of ice-houses, is due not to insensibility in the poet, but to his preoccupation with his art. He handles life from a distance, at two removes, and all the emotions awakened by the poems are emotions felt in the presence of art, not those suggested by life. The arts of painting and rhetoric are called upon to lend to poetry their subjects and their methods. From many passages in the plays it may be inferred that Shakespeare loved painting, and was familiar with a whole gallery of Renaissance pictures. Portia's elaborate comparison of Bassanio to

> young Alcides, when he did redeem
> The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
> To the sea-monster,

is only one of many allusions which can be nothing but reminiscences of pictures; and in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* the servants submit to Christopher Sly a catalogue which is the best possible commentary on Shakespeare's early poems.

> We will fetch thee straight
> Adonis painted by a running brook,
> And Cytherea all in sedges hid,

Which seem to move and wanton with her breath,
Even as the waving sedges play with wind.
We'll show thee Io as she was a maid,
And how she was beguiled and surpris'd,
As lively painted as the deed was done:
Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,
Scratching her legs, that one shall swear she bleeds;
And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,
So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn.

Here is the very theme of *Venus and Adonis*, and another theme closely akin to *The Rape of Lucrece*. It would not be rash to say outright that both the poems were suggested by pictures, and must be read and appreciated in the light of that fact. But the truth for criticism remains the same if they took their sole origin from the series of pictures painted in words by the master-hand of Ovid. "So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn."

The rhetorical art of the poems is no less manifest. The tirades and laments of both poems, on Love and Lust, on Night, and Time, and Opportunity, are exquisitely modulated rhetorical diversions; they express rage, sorrow, melancholy, despair; and it is all equally soothing and pleasant, like listening to a dreamy sonata. Lucrece, at the tragic crisis of her history, decorates her speech with far-fetched illustrations and the arabesques of a pensive fancy. And as if her own disputation of her case were not enough, the poet pursues her with "sentences," conveying appropriate moral reflections. She is sadder than ever when she hears the birds sing; and he is ready with the poetical statutes that apply to her case:

'Tis double death to drown in ken of shore;
He ten times pines that pines beholding food;
To see the salve doth make the wound ache more;
Great grief grieves most at that would do it good.

There is no morality in the general scheme of these poems; the morality is all inlaid, making of the poem a rich mosaic. The plays have to do with a world too real to be included in a simple moral scheme; the poems with a world too artificial to be brought into any vital relation with morality. The main motive prompting the poet is the love of beauty for beauty's sake, and of wit for the exercise of wit.

It is at this point that Shakespeare was touched by the new spirit of the Renaissance. That great movement of the mind of man brought with it the exhilaration of an untried freedom and the zest of an unlimited experiment; but it took the human soul from its station in a balanced and rounded scheme of things, to deliver it over to every kind of danger and excess. The wonderful system of Catholic theology gave man his place in the universe; it taught him his duties, allowed for his weaknesses, and at all times exhibited him in so complex a scheme of fixed relations, mundane and celestial, extending beyond the very bounds of thought, that only a temper of absolute humility could carry the burden lightly, or look without terror down those endless vistas of law and providence. From his servant's estate in th [illegible] enormous nature of the task, which after three centuries is still hardly begun, did not at first oppress him; he was like a child out of school, trying his strength and resource in all kinds of fantastic and extravagant attempts. It was an age of new philosophies, new arts, new cults, none of them modest or sober, all full of the spirit of bravado, high towering but not broad-based, erected as monuments to the skill and prowess of the individual. That arrogance

and self-sufficiency of craft which by the men of the Renaissance was called virtue is found in many different guises; and Shakespeare did not wholly escape the prevalent infection. What the love of power was to Marlowe, the love of beauty was to him. In these early poems the Venus of the Renaissance takes him captive,

> Leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain.

The devout religion of the eye and ear is all-in-all to him: his world is a world of gleaming forms and beautiful speech. He exhibits beauty as Marlowe exhibits power, freed from all realistic human conditions. Only here and there in the poems a note of observation, a touch of homely metaphor, remind us that he is not out of reach of the solid earth that is hereafter to be his empire. This passionate cult of beauty was transformed, rather than superseded, by the intrusion of thought and sorrow; so that the much talked of phases, or stages, in Wordsworth's love of nature are paralleled by similar stages in Shakespeare's love of humanity. If the poems were lost, we should know all too little of his apprenticeship, when human life was to him

> An appetite, a feeling, and a joy,
> That had no need of a remoter charm;

when his delight in the shows and exercises of the world left him no leisure for unintelligible problems or unwelcome cares.

His early play of *Titus Andronicus*, which is like the poems, shows how strangely hard-hearted this love of beauty can be, and makes it easy to understand how he was fascinated and dominated, for a time, by Marlowe. Yet even in *Venus and Adonis* there is evidence that he has outgrown Marlowe, and is on

the way to a serener and wiser view of things. The protest of Adonis, beginning "Call it not love," is unlike anything in Marlowe, and sounds the knell of violent ambitions and desires.

> Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,
> But Lust's effect is tempest after sun;
> Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain;
> Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done;
> Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies;
> Love is all truth, Lust full of forged lies.

These early exercises in description and moralisation served him well in his dramatic work. The same skill that described the hare-hunt and the escape of Adonis' horse is seen in the minutely drawn picture of the apothecary's shop in *Romeo and Juliet*; but the detail in this later picture subserves the human drama, and testifies to the quickening of all Romeo's faculties by the sudden excitement of grief. It is not always so; the poet in Shakespeare sometimes forgets the dramatist, and interjects a fanciful description, elaborated for its own sake, and assigned, without ceremony, to be spoken by the nearest stander-by. The description of the little princes in the Tower, "their lips like four red roses on a stalk," is put into the mouths of their murderers; and the landscape of Ophelia's death, as it is sketched by the Queen, is a wonderful piece of poetry, but has no dramatic value in relation to the speaker.

After *The Rape of Lucrece* Shakespeare, so far as we can tell, published no more, neither poem nor drama. In 1609 there was issued a small quarto volume entitled *Shakespeare's Sonnets, Never before Imprinted.* Its price, at that time, was sixpence, and it was introduced by a dedication, which ran as follows: *To the onlie begetter of these insuing Sonnets Mr. W. H. all happinesse and that*

eternitie promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth. T. T.

This is not the place nor the time for the discussion of all the attempts that have been made to unravel the most tangled problem of Shakespeare criticism. There are many footprints around the cave of this mystery, none of them pointing in the outward direction. No one has ever attempted a solution of the problem without leaving a book behind him; and the shrine of Shakespeare is thickly hung with these votive offerings, all withered and dusty. No one has ever sought to gain access to this heaven of poetry by a privileged and secret stairway, without being blown ten thousand leagues awry, over the backside of the world, into the Paradise of Fools. The quest remains unachieved.

Many books have been written on the dedication alone. Among recent adventurers, Mr. Sidney Lee has revived the theory of Boswell and Chalmers, which, by taking "begetter" in the sense of "procurer," reduces the dedication to perfect insignificance. The writer of the dedication, and owner of the copyright, was one Thomas Thorpe, who held an obscure position in the bookselling and publishing world of London. Shakespeare's Sonnets, as we know from the allusion to them, in 1598, by Francis Meres, were circulated in manuscript "among his private friends." According to Mr. Lee, copies of them were privily obtained, through some unknown channel, by one William Hall, acting as the humble jackal of the obscure Thorpe, and were delivered by him to his master, who rewarded him with a facetious dedication, couched in terms of piratical generosity. This theory cannot be proved, but there is nothing in it to stagger belief. There are grave difficulties in accepting it, but perhaps they are not insuperable, and

it has one immense advantage: it makes waste-paper of all the acrostic literature which has gathered round the initials of Mr. W. H., and leaves us free to consider the Sonnets apart from the dedication.

Shakespeare, it is generally held, did not authorise the publication; neither, so far as appears, did he protest, or take any steps to leave the world an amended version. The bulk of the Sonnets were written before 1599, when two of them, which involve the whole story shadowed forth in many of the others, appeared in a piratical publication. The order which they follow in Thorpe's edition has never been bettered, and in most places cannot be disturbed, for they often fall into natural groups of ten, twelve, or fourteen, closely connected by the sense. Some of them are addressed to a man, and some to a woman. They are intensely personal in feeling, and run through many moods. Some explain themselves, others certainly contain allusions and references to events of which we have no record. No more wonderful or beautiful expressions of affection exist in the English language, and it has never been seriously questioned that all the Sonnets are by Shakespeare.

Are they autobiographical? Professor Dowden has replied to the question in modest and guarded words. "I believe," he says, "that Shakespeare's Sonnets express his own feelings in his own person." It is true that the autobiographical interpretation, driven too far, has assumed all kinds of extravagant forms; and poetical metaphors have been forced to prove that Shakespeare was lame, that there was an attempt to assassinate him, and so forth. But these Sonnets, by general consent, were private documents; they were not intended by Shakespeare for our perusal, but were addressed to individuals. To say that they do not

"express his own feelings in his own person," is as much as to say that they are not sincere. And every lover of poetry who has once read the Sonnets knows this to be untrue. It is not chiefly their skill that takes us captive, but the intensity of their quiet personal appeal. By virtue of this they hold their place with the greatest poetry in the world; they are rich in metaphor and various in melody, but these resources of art have been subdued to the feeling that inspires them, and have given us poems as simple and as moving as the pleading voice of a child.

All who love poetry love it because in poetry the profoundest interests of life are spoken of directly, nakedly, and sincerely. No such habitual intimacy of expression is possible in daily speech. In poetry it is possible, because the forms and conventions and restraints of art give dignity and quiet to the turbulent feelings on which they are imposed, and make passion tolerable. Without the passion there is no poetry; to recognise great poetry is to hear the authentic voice. Poetry is a touchstone for insincerity; if any one does not feel that which he desires to express, he may make a passable oration; he will never make a great poem.

No one whose opinion need be considered will maintain that Shakespeare's Sonnets are destitute of feeling. Some, whose opinions claim respect, maintain that the feeling which inspires them has nothing to do with their ostensible occasions; that they are free exercises of the poetic fancy, roaming over the dramatic possibilities of life, and finding deep expression for some of its imagined crises. Those who hold this view have not taken the trouble to explain how some of the sonnets came to be addressed or sent to any one. If it was a patron who received all these protests of inalterable and unselfish devotion, couched in language

which, ever since, has been consecrated to pure love, would he readily understand that these were the flatteries of a client, skilled in verse and lost to self-respect, hungry for favours to come? Might he not take the poet at his word, and make embarrassing inroads upon the time and energies of a busy man? Among the private friends who were favoured with these "sugar'd sonnets," what lady was it who took pleasure in so dramatic a compliment, so free an exercise of the poetic fancy, as this—

> For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
> Who art as black as hell, as dark as night!

If the sonnets were never sent, how did Thorpe get hold of them? If they were circulated among disinterested lovers of poetry, would not some of them, which deal not with general themes, but with personal relations quite inadequately explained, be as unintelligible to contemporary readers as they are to us? These are not self-contained poems, like Daniel's sonnet on Sleep, or Sidney's sonnet on the Moon; they are a commentary on certain implied events. If the events had no existence, and the sonnets are dramatic poems, it is surely essential to good drama that the situation should be made clear. Moreover, the sonnet-form was used by the Elizabethans, who followed their master Petrarch, exclusively for poems expressive of personal feeling, not for vague dramatic fantasies. The greater poets—Sidney, Spenser, Drayton—reflect in their sonnets the events of their own history. Shakespeare's sonnets are more intense than these; and less explicable, if they be deprived of all background and occasion in fact. Like Sidney, Shakespeare is always protesting against the misreading which would reduce his passion to a mere

convention. He desires to be remembered not for his style, but for his love. He disclaims the stock figures of the conventional sonneteers;

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

He does not fear homely metaphor; and none of the sonnets is more convincing in its pathos than that in which he compares himself to an infant, set down by its mother, while she chases one of the feathered creatures that has escaped from the fowl-yard:

So runn'st thou after that which flies from thee,
Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;
But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind.

The situations shadowed are unlike the conventional situations described by the tribe of sonneteers, as the hard-fought issues of a law-court are unlike the formal debates of the Courts of Love. Some of them are strange, wild, and sordid in their nature; themes not chosen by poetry, but choosing it, and making their mark on it by the force of their reality. All poetry, all art, observes certain conventions of form. These poems are sonnets. There is nothing else conventional about them, except their critics.

The facts which underlie them, and give to some of them their only possible meaning, cannot, save in the vaguest and most conjectural fashion, be reconstructed. The names of the persons involved are lost. Two of these persons are described, a beautiful wanton youth, and a dark faithless woman. With one or other of these two characters most of the sonnets, if not all of them, are concerned. The story that unrolls itself, too dimly to be called dramatic, too painfully to

be mistaken for the pastime of a courtly fancy, is a story of passionate friendship, of vows broken and renewed, of love that triumphs over unkindness, of lust that is a short madness and turns to bitterness and remorse. The voice of the poet is heard in many tones, now pleading with his friend, now railing against the woman that has ensnared him; here a hymn of passionate devotion, there a strain of veiled innuendo —clear-sighted, indecent, cynical. The discourse passes, by natural transitions, from the intimacies of love and friendship to those other feelings, not less intimate and sincere, but now grown pale by contrast with the elemental human passions: the poet's hope of fame, or his sense of degradation in ministering to the idle pleasures of the multitude. The workings of his mind are laid bare, and reveal him, in no surprising light, as subject to passion, removed by the width of the spheres from those prudent and self-contained natures whom he has sketched with grave irony in the ninety-fourth sonnet:

> They that have power to hurt, and will do none,
> That do not do the thing they most do show,
> Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
> Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
> They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
> And husband Nature's riches from expense;
> They are the lords and owners of their faces,
> Others but stewards of their excellence.

It would help us but little to know the names of the beautiful youth and the dark woman; no public records could reflect even faintly those vicissitudes of experience, exaltations and abysses of feeling, which have their sole and sufficient record in the Sonnets.

Poetry is not biography; and the value of the Sonnets to the modern reader is independent of all

knowledge of their occasion. That they were made from the material of experience is certain: Shakespeare was not a puny imitative rhymster. But the processes of art have changed the tear to a pearl, which remains to decorate new sorrows. The Sonnets speak to all who have known the chances and changes of human life. Their occasion is a thing of the past; their theme is eternal. The tragedy of which they speak is the topic and inspiration of all poetry; it is the triumph of Time, marching relentlessly over the ruin of human ambitions and human desires. It may be read in all nature and in all art; there are hints of it in the movement of the dial-hand, in the withering of flowers, in the wrinkles on a beautiful face; it comes home with the harvests of autumn, and darkens hope in the eclipses of the sun and moon; the yellowing papers of the poet and the crumbling pyramids of the builder tell of it; it speaks in the waves that break upon the shore, and in the histories that commemorate bygone civilisations. All things decay; the knowledge is as old as time, and as dull as philosophy. But what a poignancy it takes from its sudden recognition by the heart:

> Then of thy beauty do I question make,
> That thou among the wastes of time must go.

The poet considers all expedients that promise defence against the tyrant, or reprieve from his doom. With a magniloquence that is only half-hearted he promises his friend a perpetuity of life "where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men." But he knows this to be a vain hope; the monuments and memorials that have been erected against the ravages of Time are of no effect, save to supply future ages with new testimonies to his omnipotence. It is best to make terms with the destroyer, and, while submitting to

him, to cheat him of the fulness of his triumph by handing on the lamp of life:

> For nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence,
> Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

This is a mitigation and a postponement of the universal doom, but it gives no sure ground for defiance. In the last resort the only stronghold against the enemy is found in the love which is its own reward, which consoles for all losses and disappointments, which is not shaken by tempests nor obscured by clouds, which is truer than the truth of history, and stronger than the strength of corruption. Love alone is not Time's fool. So the first series of the Sonnets comes to an end; and there follows a shorter series, some of them realistic and sardonic and coarse, like an anti-Masque after the gracious ceremonial Masque of the earlier numbers. In this series is painted the history of lust, its short delights, its violence, its gentler interludes, its treachery, and the torments that reward it. There is little relief to the picture; the savage deceits of lust work out their own destiny, and leave their victim enlightened, but not consoled.

> For I have sworn thee fair; more perjured I,
> To swear against the truth so foul a lie!

The Poems of Shakespeare in no way modify that conception of his character and temper which a discerning reader might gather from the evidence of the plays. But they let us hear his voice more directly, without the intervening barrier of the drama, and they furnish us with some broken hints of the stormy trials and passions which helped him to his knowledge of the human heart, and enriched his plays with the fruits of personal experience.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEATRE

In the Sonnets Shakespeare gave expression to his own thoughts and feelings, shaping the stuff of his experience by the laws of poetic art, to the ends of poetic beauty. In the drama the same experience of life supplied him with his material, but the conditions that beset him were more complex. When he came to London he had his way to make. "Lowliness is young ambition's ladder," and the only way to success was by conforming to the prevalent fashions and usages. Later, when he had won success, he was free to try new experiments and to modify custom. But he began as an apprentice to the London stage; his early efforts as a playwright cannot be truly judged except in relation to that stage; and even his greatest plays show a careful regard for the strength and weakness of the instruments that lay ready to his hand. The world that he lived in, the stage that he wrote for, these have left their mark broad on his plays, so that those critics who study him in a philosophical vacuum are always liable to err by treating the fashions of his theatre as if they were a part of his creative genius. He was not a lordly poet who stooped to the stage and dramatised his song; he was bred in the tiring-room and on the boards; he was an actor before he was a dramatist.

The dramatic opportunities of Stratford counted for something in his history. Primitive drama flourishes everywhere in children's games. The rural communities of Elizabethan England did not leave the drama to children, but enlivened the festivals of the year with ancient plays and pastimes, which served to break the dull round of country life. The Morris dance was a kind of drama: Shakespeare knew it well, and alludes to Maid Marian and the hobby-horse. The rustic play of St. George has lasted in quiet districts down to our own day; Shakespeare had often been entertained by this uncouth kind of acting, and preserves memories of it in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, or, better, in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The Pageant of the Nine Worthies, presented by the schoolmaster, the curate, the unlettered Costard, and the refined traveller from Spain, is a fair specimen of the dramatic art as it was practised in villages. The chief business of each actor is to dress himself up and explain in doggerel rhyme who he is. Sir Nathaniel, who is a foolish, mild man, and a good bowler, is something over-weighted with the part of Alexander. But he puts on his armour and speaks his lines:

When in the world I liv'd, I was the world's Commander,
By East, West, North, and South I spread my conquering
might:
My Scutcheon plain declares that I am Alisander.

Here he is interrupted by Biron's jests, and, after a feeble attempt to regain the thread of his discourse by beginning all over again, he is driven off the stage by Costard. The whole pageant, so generously fostered and interrupted, is probably a very close study from the life, down to its very speeches, which, being written by the schoolmaster, are full of classical

allusion, and make some attempt at epigram. Another type of drama, more ambitious and poetic, was not hard to come at in Shakespeare's childhood. The cycles of Miracle Plays were still presented, in the early summer, by the trade-guilds of many towns; and it may be that Shakespeare was taken by his father to see them at Coventry. But this is hardly likely, for his trivial allusions to them bear no witness to the deep impression which must have been made upon an imaginative child by that strange and solemn pageant, dragging its slow length along, and exhibiting in selected scenes the whole drama of man, his creation, his fall, and his redemption.

Spectacles and diversions of this kind belonged to the age that was passing away, and had in them none of the intellectual excitement of a new movement. It was otherwise with the plays and interludes presented by the companies of travelling players who certainly visited Stratford. These men belonged to the new order; their plays savoured of modern wit and modern classical enthusiasm. The manner of their performances is very exactly recorded by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They would present themselves to the steward of a great house, or to the officer of a corporation, and submit a list of their pieces, with a request to be allowed to perform. Just as Hamlet compels the actors, on their arrival, to give him a specimen of their skill, so Philostrate, who is simply an Elizabethan Master of the Revels, takes care, when the rustics come with their play, to hear it over before proposing it to his master. Then he recites to Theseus a list of the entertainments provided to beguile the time between supper and bed. The plays are all mythological in subject, after the newest mode. The battle with the

Centaurs, the death of [illegible] Muses, and last, the [illegible] scene" of Pyramus and [illegible] bill. Theseus having [illegible] flourish of trumpets, the [illegible] the goodwill of the audience [illegible] of the various characters [illegible] play, and [illegible] summarises the [illegible] with him Thisbe, the [illegible] not immediately [illegible] Wall are left [illegible] plays performed at [illegible] Athens; thus also were [illegible] of Stratford, before the [illegible] the borough. The [illegible] to the audience [illegible] where the business [illegible] that a popular [illegible] and establish [illegible] audience. The actors [illegible] more willing than [illegible] in the play.

The true beginnings [illegible] are to be found in these [illegible] of noblemen's servants. [illegible] a great country house, [illegible] Hatton's at Holdenby in [illegible] with its array of tenants and retainers, was a [illegible] community; and the business of [illegible] on festive occasions fell to those of the servants and dependants who had any special skill or aptitude in the arts of music, dancing, and recitation. Originally these amateur actors and mummers were content with their occasional performances, and did not travel. But the

decay of feudalism, which is the key to most of the political and literary history of Tudor and Stuart times, explains the sudden good fortunes of the drama. The gradual disappearance of feudal tenures, the growth of towns, the enclosure of lands, the dissolution of the monasteries—all these changes undermined the old life of the country, and made it impossible for noblemen to maintain their enormous retinue of servants and beneficiaries. The literature of the sixteenth century resounds with the complaints of those who were thrown out of a livelihood, and with the not less bitter complaints of those who suffered at the hands of lawless and masterless men. Meantime, the court and the town offered new attractions and new opportunities to gentle and simple alike. A story told in *The Serving-man's Comfort*, a pamphlet of 1598, puts the position in a nutshell. A certain Earl once presented himself at the court of King Henry VIII., clad in a jerkin of frieze and hose of country russet, with a following of a hundred and twenty men, all well horsed and gallantly furnished. The King reproved him for his base and unseemly apparel. When he next came to court he wore a gown of black velvet, the sleeves set with aglets of gold, a velvet cap with a feather and gold band, bordered with precious stones, a suit of cloth of gold, and a girdle and hangers richly embroidered and set with pearl. He was attended with one man and a page. "Now," said the King, "you are as you should be; but where is your goodly train of men and horse?" "If it may like your Grace," answered the good Earl, throwing down his cap, "here is twenty men and twenty horse"; then, throwing off his gown, "here lies forty men and forty horse more"; and so he continued until, in the end, he offered the King a choice between the men and the

gay apparel. Buckingham in *Henry VIII.* expresses the same dilemma:

> O many
> Have broke their backs with laying manors on them
> For this great journey.

Here is an epitome of the Renaissance on its social side. Money was taken out of landed estates to be put into the chief speculative investment of that age, gorgeous personal attire. The yeoman's son turned adventurer and went to London. The servants of a noble house, if they could act and sing, made a profession of their pastime, and wandered over the country, ministering to the rapidly growing taste for pageants, interludes, and music. In London they found their best market. For many years they acted wherever they could find accommodation, in gardens, halls, and inn-yards. Then the opposition of the City authorities drove them outside the walls; in the playing-fields of the suburbs they found it easy to attract a concourse of people; about 1576 they erected two permanent enclosed stages in Finsbury Fields, and the Elizabethan drama had found its birthplace.

It was with these companies of actors that Shakespeare from the first had to deal; and already, before he knew them, they had attained a high degree of proficiency in their business. They were encouraged by their own masters, applauded by the populace, and favoured by the Court. The history of Richard Tarlton, the most famous of Elizabethan comic actors, who died in 1588, shows that before Shakespeare's time diligent search was made for likely talent to reinforce the profession. Tarlton, according to Fuller's account, was born at Condover in Shropshire, and "was in the field, keeping his father's swine, when a servant of Robert, Earl of Leicester, passing this way in his

Lord's lands in his Barony of Denbighe, was so highly pleased with his *happy unhappy* answers, that he brought him to Court, where he became the most famous jester to Queen Elizabeth." The actors long retained the double position; like his even more famous predecessor, Will Summer, Tarlton was a servant of Royalty, but, unlike Will Summer, he was also a professional actor, and catered for the public in the newly built theatres of London. The jesters were, without doubt, the bright particular stars of the companies to which they belonged, the most popular of the actors, and the best remunerated. They were able to entertain an audience without assistance from others, and Tarlton's pipe and tabor, his monologues and impromptus and jigs, were the delight of the public at the time when Shakespeare came to London. One of these jigs, wherein each of the short verses was satirically directed at this or that member of the audience, has the refrain "So pipeth the crow, Sitting upon a wall,—Please one, and please all." This refrain is quoted by Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*,—"it is with me as the very true Sonnet is: Please one, and please all." When Tarlton died, Will Kemp, whom we know to have been the impersonator of Dogberry, succeeded almost at once to his place in popular favour, while only less famous than Kemp were Cowley, Armin, and many others. A good illustration of the extraordinary mimetic skill displayed by these comic actors may be found in *Twelfth Night*, where the Clown, to deceive Malvolio in the prison, first assumes the voice of the parson, Sir Topas, and then carries on a dialogue, in two voices, between the parson and himself. The same clown contributes almost all of the exquisite songs, romantic and comic, which fill the play with music.

The question of the mixture of Tragedy and Comedy in the Elizabethan drama is therefore very simple: it was a question not of propriety and classical precedent, but of necessity. The people would have their favourites; and when the old variety entertainments of the early London stages gave place to serious drama, room had to be made for the most famous actors If Shakespeare held any high and dry theories of the drama, his thoughts can only have been a pain to him. He made a virtue of necessity, and in some of his plays—*The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*—he gave a magnificent largess to the professional clown. But there are not wanting signs that he was troubled by the exorbitance of his comedians, who had climbed into popular favour by their jests and ditties, their grimaces and impromptus. "Let those that play your clowns," says Hamlet, "speak no more than is set down for them: for there be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it." It is not likely that this counsel of perfection was observed by the actors Some of the tags spoken at the close of scenes by the Fool in *King Lear* are directed at the audience, and are quite irrelevant and worthless; these are either unlicensed interpolations which have crept into the text, or a contemptuous alms thrown to the Fool, to be spoken when, being alone upon the stage, he could do but little hurt to the necessary business of the play. In some of the plays the Fool is isolated, to avoid the risk of his interference. Peter, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is free to disport himself with the

musicians downstairs, or to attend the Nurse in Juliet's absence. The Clown in *Othello* has so poor a part, in a single scene with Cassio, that a comic actor of ability could hardly be expected to refrain from eking it out with invention. The Porter in *Macbeth* gets the like hard measure; he is not allowed to play the fool anywhere but at his own gate. Shakespeare was often severe with his clowns; and it is plain that he recognised those advantages of tragic simplicity which were sometimes denied to him by the very conditions of his work.

When the first regular theatres were built, they were used not only for the playing of interludes, but for all those activities which had previously been displayed either on raised scaffolds or within improvised spaces in the fields. The citizens delighted in exhibitions of juggling, tumbling, fencing, and wrestling; and these also were provided by the drama. Shakespeare is profuse in his concessions to the athletic interest. The wrestling-match in *As You Like It*, the rapier duels in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Hamlet*, the broadsword fight in *Macbeth*,—these were real displays of skill by practised combatants. The whole First Act of *Coriolanus* is so full of alarums and excursions and hand-to-hand fighting, with hard blows given and taken, that it is tedious to Shakespeare's modern admirers, but it gave keen pleasure to the patrons of the Globe. *The Comedy of Errors* is noisy with beatings and the outcries of the victims. All these things, though it discolour the complexion of his greatness to acknowledge it, were imposed upon Shakespeare by the tastes and habits of his patrons and by the fashions of the primitive theatre. It was on this robust stock that his towering thought and his delicate fancy were grafted.

When he first arrived in London, the drama was at the crisis of its early history. Acting had flourished, throughout the reign of Elizabeth, in many places and in the most diverse kinds. The performance of plays written in imitation of Seneca for tragedy, and of Plautus for comedy, had the approval of scholars, and was a recognised entertainment at the universities and the Inns of Court In still higher circles, comedies based on mythological and classical themes were acted chiefly by companies of singing boys—the Children of Paul's, or the Children of the Chapel Royal. The native comic tradition was unbroken from the earliest times, and even in these courtly comedies room was made for the antics of the Vice and the Clown. But tragedy was a new thing in England, little understood, and not much relished. It had found the dreariest of models in Seneca, who values tragic situation only as a peg on which to hang the commentaries of a teacher of rhetoric and philosophy. The first English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, is an academic debate on certain problems of conduct arising out of an ancient story; and the same Senecan model was placidly followed by Samuel Daniel and Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, long after the rise of the newer school. But for the accident of genius, tragedy in England might have continued as an imitative exercise, practised chiefly by argumentative philosophers.

What happened is so well known that it has almost lost its wonder. A band of young men from the universities threw away their academic pride, and invaded the popular stages, which had hitherto been chiefly catered for by clowns and jugglers and players of short comic interludes. They were not scholars, in any strict sense of that word: Marlowe, Peele, Greene, and Lodge belong to that numerous class

musicians downstairs, or to attend the Nurse in Juliet's absence. The Clown in *Othello* has so poor a part, in a single scene with Cassio, that a comic actor of ability could hardly be expected to refrain from eking it out with invention. The Porter in *Macbeth* gets the like hard measure; he is not allowed to play the fool anywhere but at his own gate. Shakespeare was often severe with his clowns; and it is plain that he recognised those advantages of tragic simplicity which were sometimes denied to him by the very conditions of his work.

When the first regular theatres were built, they were used not only for the playing of interludes, but for all those activities which had previously been displayed either on raised scaffolds or within improvised spaces in the fields. The citizens delighted in exhibitions of juggling, tumbling, fencing, and wrestling; and these also were provided by the drama. Shakespeare is profuse in his concessions to the athletic interest. The wrestling-match in *As You Like It*, the rapier duels in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Hamlet*, the broadsword fight in *Macbeth*,—these were real displays of skill by practised combatants. The whole First Act of *Coriolanus* is so full of alarums and excursions and hand-to-hand fighting, with hard blows given and taken, that it is tedious to Shakespeare's modern admirers, but it gave keen pleasure to the patrons of the Globe. *The Comedy of Errors* is noisy with beatings and the outcries of the victims. All these things, though it discolour the complexion of his greatness to acknowledge it, were imposed upon Shakespeare by the tastes and habits of his patrons and by the fashions of the primitive theatre. It was on this robust stock that his towering thought and his delicate fancy were grafted.

When he first arrived in London, the drama was at the crisis of its early history. Acting had flourished, throughout the reign of Elizabeth, in many places and in the most diverse kinds. The performance of plays written in imitation of Seneca for tragedy, and of Plautus for comedy, had the approval of scholars, and was a recognised entertainment at the universities and the Inns of Court. In still higher circles, comedies based on mythological and classical themes were acted chiefly by companies of singing boys—the Children of Paul's, or the Children of the Chapel Royal. The native comic tradition was unbroken from the earliest times, and even in these courtly comedies room was made for the antics of the Vice and the Clown. But tragedy was a new thing in England, little understood, and not much relished. It had found the dreariest of models in Seneca, who values tragic situation only as a peg on which to hang the commentaries of a teacher of rhetoric and philosophy. The first English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, is an academic debate on certain problems of conduct arising out of an ancient story; and the same Senecan model was placidly followed by Samuel Daniel and Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, long after the rise of the newer school. But for the accident of genius, tragedy in England might have continued as an imitative exercise, practised chiefly by argumentative philosophers.

What happened is so well known that it has almost lost its wonder. A band of young men from the universities threw away their academic pride, and invaded the popular stages, which had hitherto been chiefly catered for by clowns and jugglers and players of short comic interludes. They were not scholars, in any strict sense of that word: Marlowe, Peele, Greene, and Lodge belong to that numerous class

who, in the words of Anthony à Wood, "did in a manner neglect academical studies." But they had been caught by the Latin poets, and were eager students of the new literature of the Renaissance in Italy, France, and Spain. In London, as at Oxford and Cambridge, the more regular avenues of preferment were closed to them, and they were put to their shifts for a livelihood. To write for the booksellers, supplying them with poems, love-pamphlets, and translations, was the obvious resource; the hard-earned gains of authorship might be handsomely increased by any one who was lucky enough to find a generous patron. But before they had been long in London they must have made acquaintance with a newly risen class of men, who lived at an easier rate. Those "glorious vagabonds," the stage-players, were conspicuous in the streets of the town,

> Sweeping it in their glaring satin suits,
> And pages to attend their masterships.

Greene, in his *Groatsworth of Wit*, tells how he was first invited to write for the stage. A player, magnificently dressed, like a gentleman of great living, overheard him repeating some verses, and offered him lodging and employment. The player, by his own account, was both actor and dramatic author. Besides playing the King of the Fairies, he had borne a part in *The Twelve Labours of Hercules*, and in a piece called *The Devil on the Highway to Heaven*. His own works were Morality plays, suitable for country audiences; the two that he mentions were entitled *The Moral of Man's Wit* and *The Dialogue of Dives*. But these educational plays, he said, had fallen out of esteem, and there was room for the newer inventions of a scholar. Greene went along with him; and,

lodging "at the town's end, in a house of retail," soon became famous as "an arch play-making poet," and learned to associate with the lewdest persons in the land.

There is no reason to doubt the autobiographical truth of this account. But Greene was not the first, nor the greatest, of the innovators. The credit of transforming the popular drama belongs chiefly to Marlowe. Before his arrival Lyly had shown the way to make classical mythology engaging, and Peele had used blank verse so that it rang in the ear and dwelt in the memory. The work of these men was designed for select courtly circles, and left the wider public untouched. Marlowe appealed to the people. He brought blank verse on to the public stage and sent it echoing through the town. He proved that classical fable needs no dictionary to make it popular. Above all, he imagined great and serious actions, and created the heroic character. His play of *Tamburlaine*, produced about 1587, made subtle appeal to the national interests, to the love of adventure in far countries, and to the indomitable heart of youth. The success of this play is perhaps the greatest event in our literary history. It naturalised tragedy in England, and put an end, at a blow, to all the futilities of the theorists. More important still, it vindicated audacity, and taught poets to believe in the conquest of the world. Like all great and original works which catch the happy moment, it was multiplied in its echoes, and rapidly became a school. Marlowe's friends and fellows accepted his lead, recognised his triumph, and abandoned their own less fortunate experiments to claim a share in his success. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* almost vied with *Tamburlaine* in popular favour, and the most extravagant ventures of Peele and Greene and Nashe

were carried to victory on the same tide. While his companions imitated his earliest work Marlowe put it behind him, and advanced to new triumphs. During the few remaining years of his short life he produced *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II.*—not to speak of his poems and unfinished plays. He died in 1593, the year of the publication of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*.

During the last seven years or so of Marlowe's life Shakespeare was learning his business in London. No hint or fragment of a record remains to instruct us concerning his professional doings until near the end of this period. Many fanciful histories of these years have been written, rich in detail, built on guesses and inferences. The broad facts of the case have too often been hidden under these speculative structures; and they are worth remembering, for though they lend themselves to no sectarian conclusions, and lead to no brilliant discoveries, they set a vague and half-obliterated picture in a true perspective.

Shakespeare's beginnings were not courtly, but popular. He was plunged into the wild Bohemian life of actors and dramatists at a time when nothing was fixed or settled, when every month brought forth some new thing, and popularity was the only road to success. There was fierce rivalry among the companies of actors to catch the public ear. Tragedy acknowledged one man for master; and a new school of actors was growing up to meet the demand for poetic declamation. Comedy, the older foundation, was unchanged, and remained in the hands of the professional jesters. No new comic genius had arisen to share supremacy with Marlowe. Those who supplied the public with plays endeavoured to combine as many as possible of the resources of the stage in a single dramatic work.

Their reward was found in crowded theatres, not in literary reputation. Force, stridency, loud jesting and braggart declamation carried the day, and left no room for the daintiness of the literary conscience. The people, intoxicated with the new delight, craved incessantly for fresh stimulants; a play ran for but a few days, then it was laid aside and a new one was hastily put together out of any material that came to hand. History and fiction were ransacked for stories; old plays were refurbished and patched with no regard to their authorship, a play written by one man and found to be lacking in some element of popular success was altered and supplemented by another man. If Ben Jonson had made his first acquaintance with the stage at the time when Shakespeare came to London, he would probably have withdrawn in disgust from the attempt to impose dignity and order on this noisy, motley world; he would have sought refuge with the pedants and academicians, and the national drama would have lost him. Shakespeare accepted the facts, and subdued his hand to what it worked in. When he first comes into notice as a dramatist, in 1592, he is accused by the dying Greene of gaining credit for himself by vamping the plays of better men. In the attempt to make mischief between his fellow-dramatists and Shakespeare, Greene uses language which proves that Shakespeare was in closer touch with the players than the University wits had ever been. "Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country." The line from *Henry VI.* which is here parodied by

Greene points his railing against that play, and gives us our first sure date in Shakespeare's dramatic history.

If now we turn to the collection of Shakespeare's plays in the Folio, we find that the conditions under which his work was done are only too faithfully reflected in that volume. More than one or two of these plays, as they stand in the Folio, are, to put it bluntly, bad plays; poor and confused in structure, or defaced with feeble writing. Some of them contain whole scenes written in Shakespeare's most splendid manner, and fully conceived characters drawn with all his vigour, while other scenes and other characters in the same play pass the bounds of inanity. There is an attractive simplicity about the criticism which attributes all that is good to Shakespeare, and all that is bad to "an inferior hand." On this principle *Titus Andronicus* has been stoutly alleged to contain no single line of Shakespeare's composing. But if once we are foolishly persuaded to go behind the authority of Heminge and Condell (reinforced, in the case of *Titus*, by the testimony of Francis Meres), we have lost our only safe anchorage, and are afloat upon a wild and violent sea, subject to every wind of doctrine. No critical ear, however highly respected, can safely set itself up against the evidence of Shakespeare's friends. It is wiser to believe that the plays in the Folio were attributed to Shakespeare either because they were wholly his, or because they were recast and rewritten by him, or, lastly, because they contain enough of his work to warrant the attribution. Even so, there is a wide margin for conjecture, and the case would be desperate were it not for one significant consolation. None of the plays which have been shown to belong to the middle period of Shakespeare's career, including his maturer histories and comedies, and most

of the great tragedies, has ever been challenged. On the other hand, the plays of his early period, and a good many of those belonging to his later period from *Macbeth* and *Timon* onwards, are involved in controversy. The conclusions generally accepted by criticism may be broadly stated. At the beginning of his career Shakespeare made very free use of the work of other men, and, moreover, sometimes reshaped his own work, so that it is often difficult to assess the extent of his rights in the play as we have it. Towards the end of his career his work is once more found mixed with the work of other men, but this time there is generally reason to suspect that it is these others who have laid him under contribution, altering his completed plays, or completing his unfinished work by additions of their own. Yet a third case of difficulty arises when a play which bears throughout the strongest marks of Shakespeare's workmanship is disparate in its parts, and hangs ill together Further questions spring from these. How far have we to reckon with willing collaboration, early and late? Who were the authors of the anonymous plays that he used as the basis of some of his own early work? To what extent were his dramas modified for representation on the stage during the years intervening between their first appearance and the publication of the Folio; and in how many cases were these modified versions printed by the editors of the Folio?

To answer these questions in detail is the business of Shakespeare criticism. The results obtained by the most laborious scholars command no general assent, and depend, for the most part, on a chain of ingenious hypotheses. If marks of interrogation were inserted in all treatises on Shakespeare at all the points where modesty demands them, the syntax of these works

would be sadly broken. To keep the mind open when there is no sufficient warrant for closing it is the rarest of human achievements. The difficult task shall here be attempted; and a few brief illustrations of the nature of these knotty problems must serve in place of a more ambitious edifice.

The Taming of the Shrew was first printed in the Folio. There are no contemporary references to it, and it contains no allusions which can be used to determine its date, but it has many of the characteristics of Shakespeare's early work. The plot is double, combining two stories from different sources. That part of the play which tells the story of Bianca and her lovers has, for very flimsy reasons, been denied by some critics to Shakespeare. The scenes wherein Katherine and Petruchio appear are undoubtedly his; and these scenes are exactly modelled on an extant comedy of 1594, called *The Taming of a Shrew*. This earlier play is hasty and vigorous in execution; it has not the full flow of Shakespeare's eloquence; its language is rude in the comic parts, and the more serious speeches are written in a parody of the style of Marlowe, which, by some sly touches of exaggeration, is delightfully adapted to the purposes of comedy. The play is nevertheless a work of comic genius; and contains, without exception, all the ludicrous situations which are the making of Shakespeare's comedy. The wild behaviour of Petruchio at his wedding, the tantalising of the hungry bride with imaginary meats, and the riotous scene with the tailor, are essentially the same in both plays, and give occasion for many identical turns of wit. In the earlier play, as in the later, Katherine submits to her lord by accepting his opinion on the question of the sun and moon, and when he indulges his humour by

pretending that an old man is a young budding virgin, she falls in with his mad fancy and outgoes him in gaiety. "Fair Lady," she says to the greybeard,

> Wrap up thy radiations in some cloud,
> Lest that thy beauty make this stately town
> Inhabitable, like the burning zone,
> With sweet reflections of thy lovely face.

Further, the whole business of the Induction and the humours of Christopher Sly are already full-grown in the earlier play, which contains some passages worthy of Shakespeare yet omitted in the later version. When the Duke, in the course of the action, orders two of the characters to be taken to prison, Sly wakes up, at the word, from his drunken sleep, and protests: "I say we'll have no sending to prison." In vain the Lords remind him that this is but a play, acted in jest; he is firm in his resolve. "I tell thee, Sim, we'll have no sending to prison, that's flat. why, Sim, am not I Don Christo Vary? Therefore I say they shall not go to prison" When at last he is assured that they have run away, he is mollified, calls for some more drink, orders the play to proceed, and resumes his slumbers.

If the Bianca scenes are not his, Shakespeare is thus left with nothing but a reviser's share in the stronger part of the play. But who wrote the play of 1594? Among the authors who were then writing for the stage we know of only one man who was certainly capable of writing it, and that man is Shakespeare himself. If his authorship of it could be proved, it would be a document of the very highest value as a sample of the work that he did in his early time. In the absence of such proof, the assumption that he wrote it could only serve as a new sandy site for the

fabric of conjecture. The play, whoever wrote it, helps us to a knowledge of the early London theatre. It is not much more than half as long as Shakespeare's later version, and was acted by the Earl of Pembroke's servants. Its author, writing at a time when the bragging blank verse of Marlowe had become the common theatrical jargon, yet shows himself conscious of the unfitness of these heroics for the portrayal of daily life, and gently topples them over into absurdity. He has a firm hold on reality, a rich store of colloquial speech, and a wonderful fertility in the invention of comic situation. In all these respects he resembles Shakespeare, who gradually freed himself from the influence of Marlowe and indulged his own more humane genius, until the style made fashionable by Marlowe's imitators is found at last, in *Hamlet*, to be fit only for the ranting speeches of the players, and the admiring criticism of Polonius.

The questions that arise in connection with Shakespeare's later work may be well illustrated by the case of *Timon of Athens*. This play also occurs only in the Folio, and cannot be exactly dated. It is usually placed after the four great tragedies, and immediately before *Antony and Cleopatra*—that is to say, about the year 1607. In one respect it is utterly unlike these neighbours. There is no other play of Shakespeare's with so simple a plot. *Timon of Athens* is the exhibition of a single character in contrasted situations. Timon is rich and generous, which is matter for the First Act; his riches and his friends fail him in the Second and Third Acts; he retires to a desert place outside the city, curses mankind, and dies, which climax is the theme of the Fourth and Fifth Acts. There is nothing in all Shakespeare's work more stupendous than the colossal figure of Timon, raining his terrible impreca-

tions on the littleness and falsehood of mankind. Yet the play as a whole is unsatisfying, because the cause is inadequate to produce the effect. No one can read the play and believe that Shakespeare intended a satire on misanthropy: Timon's passion is heart-rending and awe-inspiring; desolation and despair never spoke with more convincing accents. Yet when we examine the events that lead up to the crisis, and the characters who are grouped around Timon, they seem like excuses and shadows, hastily sketched as a kind of conventional framework for the great central figure. The machinery is carelessly put together, and the writing, in these outlying parts of the play, is often flat. The critics have been busy with this case, and have called in the inevitable collaborator. Some of them generously allow Shakespeare two helpers (Rowley is always a useful supplementary name), and divide up the play line by line, assigning their exact portions to the lion, the ape, and the beast of burden. The problem is a very difficult one, and these conjectures are ingenious, but have not led to a convincing result. They are vitiated by the superstition which refuses to assign to Shakespeare any hasty or careless work. Yet he was a purveyor to the public stage, and surely must have been pressed, as the modern journalist is pressed, to supply needed matter. Many authors who have suffered this pressure have settled their account with their conscience by dividing their work into two kinds Some of it they do frankly as journey-work, making it as good as time and circumstances permit. The rest they keep by them, revising and polishing it to satisfy their own more exacting ideals. Shakespeare did both kinds of work, and the bulk of his writing has come down to us without distinction made between the better and the worse.

This consideration should be kept in mind by those who profess ability to recognise his style. The style of an author and the changes in his style are fairly easy to recognise when we have to do only with a sequence of works carefully written, and put forth over his own name. The problem would be enormously complicated if his most careless talk and his most hurried business letters were included in the account. And the problem has been complicated in Shakespeare's case by the pressure of theatrical conditions.

These conditions are visible in their results. There is good reason to think that many of his comedies are recasts of his own earlier versions, now lost to us. It is wrong to suppose that these earlier versions were revised from motives of literary pride. The early *Taming of a Shrew* and the first version of *Hamlet* point the way to a more likely conclusion. When the theatre came to its maturity, complete five-act plays, with two plots and everything handsome about them, were required to fill the afternoon. The earlier and slighter plays and interludes were then enlarged and adapted to the new demands. It was not easy, even for Shakespeare, to supply his best work, freshly wrought from fresh material, at the rate of two plays a year. For certain marvellous years he almost did it; and, as likely as not, the effort killed him. The Vicar of Stratford says that he died of a drinking-bout, but a drinking-bout seldom gives more than the *coup de grâce.* No man, not even one who was only a little lower than the angels, could live through the work that Shakespeare did, from *Hamlet* to *Antony and Cleopatra,* without paying for it in health. He must have bowed under the strain, "unless his nerves were brass or hammered steel." But the theatre, having devoured the products of his intense labour, was as hungry as

ever, and unremitting in its demands. In *Timon of Athens* we see how these demands were met. The close likeness between Timon and King Lear has often been noticed, so that it is not unfair to say that in *King Lear* Shakespeare treated the very theme of *Timon*, and treated it better, with all added circumstances of likelihood. The passion of the lonely old king on the heath passes by degrees into the fiercest misanthropy, but it carries our sympathy with it, for we have watched it from its beginning, and have been made to feel the cruelty of the causes that provoked it. After *King Lear*, nothing new could be made of the same figure in a weaker setting. But if, as seems likely, *Timon* is a first sketch of *King Lear*, set aside unfinished because the story proved intractable and no full measure of sympathy could be demanded for its hero, the position is explained. Shakespeare, the artist, had no further use for Timon; Shakespeare, the popular playwright, laid his hand on the discarded fragment of a play, and either expanded it himself, or, more probably, permitted another to expand it, to the statutory bulk of five acts.

This conclusion might be strengthened by several parallel instances, which justify us in believing that Shakespeare sometimes made more than one attempt at the treatment of a dramatic theme, and that his failures, so to call them, were subsequently pieced out with other matter, to meet the demands of the theatre. One instance must suffice. Incomparably the most popular love-story of the earlier sixteenth century was the story of Troilus and Cressida. To a young man seeking for a dramatic subject this theme could not fail to occur. It is handled by Shakespeare in one of his later plays, which was printed in 1609, and had been acted, before that time, at the Globe theatre The

play of *Troilus and Cressida* is the despair of all critics who seek in it for unity of purpose or meaning. It is a bad play, crowded with wonders and beauties. The love-story is written, for the most part, in the style of *Romeo and Juliet* and the early comedies, with many similar phrases and jests. The political parts are in Shakespeare's full-armoured mature style, laden with thought, and richly decorated with eloquence. Love and politics are made to engage our ardent sympathies in turn, without any interaction, and are both turned to mockery by a chorus of sensualist and cynic, Pandarus and Thersites. The general impression left by the play is unpleasant only because it is hopelessly confused. The lyrical rapture of Troilus and the resonant wisdom of Ulysses are not effectively put to shame; they rise here and there above the din of traffickers and brawlers; but the play is not theirs; they cry out in the market-place, and no man regards them. Dryden comments on the faults inherent in the play, and states that Shakespeare composed it "in the apprenticeship of his writing." It is not credible that the speeches of Ulysses belong to this early time. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the love-passages of the Third Act, which are untouched by the spirit of satire, and show Cressida pure and simple, were written after *Romeo and Juliet*—a mere repetition. In the absence of any other intelligible theory, it may be surmised that Shakespeare at first took up Chaucer's story with the intent of making it into a tragedy. But the story is not outwardly tragic; the chief persons, as Dryden remarks, are left alive; and the events of their history were too notorious to be altered by a playwright. Chaucer in his long narrative poem achieves the impossible; he keeps the reader in sympathy with

the love-lorn Troilus, with the faithless Cressida, and with his own reflections on the vanity of earthly desire. These are the miracles of a story-teller; they may well have misled even Shakespeare, until he tried to transfer them to the stage, and found that the history of Troilus and Cressida is not a fit theme for a lyrical love-drama. He wrote *Romeo and Juliet* instead, and retained the go-between in the character of the Nurse, who is twin-sister to Pandarus even in tricks of speech, and derives from the same great original. Later on, when a play was required, and the time was short, he chose the romance of Troy, in its larger aspects, as the theme of a political drama, and eked it out with the earlier incomplete play. The failure and miscarriage of everything through human lust and human weakness is the only principle of coherence in the composite play, and accordingly Thersites is its hero. Yet Thersites is made odious; so that we are left with the impression that the author, after mocking at love and war and statecraft, mocks also at his own disaffection. In no other instance does he come so near to the restlessness of egotism; but his poetry is irrepressible; in single passages the play is great, and by these it is remembered.

All this doubtful speculation as to the genesis of particular plays may be fairly dispensed with in considering the works of Shakespeare's prime. At an early period of his career he attached himself to the Lord Chamberlain's company of players, which on the accession of James I became the King's company, and he seems to have remained constant to it thereafter. For this company the Globe theatre was built on the Bankside in 1599; as the Fortune theatre in Cripplegate was built, at about the same time, for their chief rivals, the Lord Admiral's company. There can be no

play of *Troilus and Cressida* is the despair of all critics who seek in it for unity of purpose or meaning. It is a bad play, crowded with wonders and beauties. The love-story is written, for the most part, in the style of *Romeo and Juliet* and the early comedies, with many similar phrases and jests. The political parts are in Shakespeare's full-armoured mature style, laden with thought, and richly decorated with eloquence. Love and politics are made to engage our ardent sympathies in turn, without any interaction, and are both turned to mockery by a chorus of sensualist and cynic, Pandarus and Thersites. The general impression left by the play is unpleasant only because it is hopelessly confused. The lyrical rapture of Troilus and the resonant wisdom of Ulysses are not effectively put to shame; they rise here and there above the din of traffickers and brawlers; but the play is not theirs; they cry out in the market-place, and no man regards them. Dryden comments on the faults inherent in the play, and states that Shakespeare composed it "in the apprenticeship of his writing." It is not credible that the speeches of Ulysses belong to this early time. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the love-passages of the Third Act, which are untouched by the spirit of satire, and show Cressida pure and simple, were written after *Romeo and Juliet*—a mere repetition. In the absence of any other intelligible theory, it may be surmised that Shakespeare at first took up Chaucer's story with the intent of making it into a tragedy. But the story is not outwardly tragic; the chief persons, as Dryden remarks, are left alive; and the events of their history were too notorious to be altered by a playwright. Chaucer in his long narrative poem achieves the impossible; he keeps the reader in sympathy with

the love-lorn Troilus, with the faithless Cressida, and with his own reflections on the vanity of earthly desire. These are the miracles of a story-teller; they may well have misled even Shakespeare, until he tried to transfer them to the stage, and found that the history of Troilus and Cressida is not a fit theme for a lyrical love-drama. He wrote *Romeo and Juliet* instead, and retained the go-between in the character of the Nurse, who is twin-sister to Pandarus even in tricks of speech, and derives from the same great original. Later on, when a play was required, and the time was short, he chose the romance of Troy, in its larger aspects, as the theme of a political drama, and eked it out with the earlier incomplete play. The failure and miscarriage of everything through human lust and human weakness is the only principle of coherence in the composite play, and accordingly Thersites is its hero Yet Thersites is made odious, so that we are left with the impression that the author, after mocking at love and war and statecraft, mocks also at his own disaffection. In no other instance does he come so near to the restlessness of egotism; but his poetry is irrepressible; in single passages the play is great, and by these it is remembered.

All this doubtful speculation as to the genesis of particular plays may be fairly dispensed with in considering the works of Shakespeare's prime. At an early period of his career he attached himself to the Lord Chamberlain's company of players, which on the accession of James I became the King's company, and he seems to have remained constant to it thereafter. For this company the Globe theatre was built on the Bankside in 1599; as the Fortune theatre in Cripplegate was built, at about the same time, for their chief rivals, the Lord Admiral's company. There can be no

doubt that Shakespeare was, from the first, in high authority at the Globe. The date of its building coincides with the beginning of his greatest dramatic period, when he abandoned the historical and comic themes which had won him popularity, and set himself to teach English tragedy a higher flight. His tragedies and Roman plays, it is safe to assume, were brought out at this theatre under his own supervision; the actors were probably instructed by himself; the very building was possibly designed for his requirements. The plays of his maturity were therefore produced, as few dramatists can hope to see their plays produced, in exact conformity with the author's intentions. His chief tragic actor, Richard Burbage, to judge from those faint echoes of opinion which are an actor's only memorial, was among the greatest of English tragedians, and at least had this inestimable advantage over Betterton and Garrick, that the author was at hand to offer criticism and counsel. We know enough of Shakespeare's views on acting to be sure that an unfamiliar quiet reigned at the Globe; the aspiring tragedian was taught to do his roaring gently; the strutting player,—

> whose conceit
> Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
> To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
> 'Twixt his stretch'd footing and the scaffoldage,—

was subdued to a more temperate behaviour; and the poetry of the long speeches was recited, as it has not very often been recited since, with care given first to melody and continuity of discourse.

The stage at these early theatres was a raised bare platform, jutting out some considerable distance among the audience, so that the groups of players were seen from many points of view, and had to aim at statuesque

rather than pictorial effect. The central part of the theatre, into which the stage protruded, was unroofed; and plays were given by the light of day. There was no painted scene- [illegible]
erection, hollow [illegible]
of tapestry, ser[illegible]
tomb, and the canopy of Desdemona's bed, and the hovel where poor Tom in *Lear* is found taking refuge from the storm. The top of the structure was used as occasion demanded, for the battlements of Flint Castle in *Richard II.*, or for the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*, or for the window in Shylock's house whence Jessica throws the casket, or for Cleopatra's monument, to which the dying Antony is raised to take his farewell of Egypt. No women appeared on the public stage, and the parts of women were taken by boys. This last is perhaps the most startling feature in the usage of the Elizabethan stage When Cleopatra describes the ignominy of being led to Rome, she alludes to it:

> The quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore.

It is strange to remember that a boy spoke these lines. And the same irony of situation must surely have become almost dangerous in the speech of Volumnia, the Roman matron:

> Think with thyself,
> How more unfortunate than all living women
> Are we come hither.

So too with Shakespeare's favourite device of putting his heroines into boy's dress. The boys who

doubt that Shakespeare was, from the first, in high authority at the Globe. The date of its building coincides with the beginning of his greatest dramatic period, when he abandoned the historical and comic themes which had won him popularity, and set himself to teach English tragedy a higher flight. His tragedies and Roman plays, it is safe to assume, were brought out at this theatre under his own supervision; the actors were probably instructed by himself; the very building was possibly designed for his requirements. The plays of his maturity were therefore produced, as few dramatists can hope to see their plays produced, in exact conformity with the author's intentions. His chief tragic actor, Richard Burbage, to judge from those faint echoes of opinion which are an actor's only memorial, was among the greatest of English tragedians, and at least had this inestimable advantage over Betterton and Garrick, that the author was at hand to offer criticism and counsel. We know enough of Shakespeare's views on acting to be sure that an unfamiliar quiet reigned at the Globe; the aspiring tragedian was taught to do his roaring gently; the strutting player,—

whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
'Twixt his stretch'd footing and the scaffoldage,—

was subdued to a more temperate behaviour; and the poetry of the long speeches was recited, as it has not very often been recited since, with care given first to melody and continuity of discourse.

The stage at these early theatres was a raised bare platform, jutting out some considerable distance among the audience, so that the groups of players were seen from many points of view, and had to aim at statuesque

rather than pictorial effect. The central part of the theatre, into which the stage protruded, was unroofed; and plays were given by the light of day. There was no painted scenery. At the back of the stage a wooden erection, hollow underneath, and hung with some kind of tapestry, served many purposes. It was Juliet's tomb, and the canopy of Desdemona's bed, and the hovel where poor Tom in *Lear* is found taking refuge from the storm. The top of the structure was used as occasion demanded, for the battlements of Flint Castle in *Richard II.*, or for the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*, or for the window in Shylock's house whence Jessica throws the casket, or for Cleopatra's monument, to which the dying Antony is raised to take his farewell of Egypt. No women appeared on the public stage, and the parts of women were taken by boys. This last is perhaps the most startling feature in the usage of the Elizabethan stage When Cleopatra describes the ignominy of being led to Rome, she alludes to it:

> The quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore

It is strange to remember that a boy spoke these lines. And the same irony of situation must surely have become almost dangerous in the speech of Volumnia, the Roman matron:

> Think with thyself,
> How more unfortunate than all living women
> Are we come hither.

So too with Shakespeare's favourite device of putting his heroines into boy's dress. The boys who

acted Rosalind, Viola, and Julia, had the difficult task of pretending to be girls disguised as boys. In spite of all this, it may be doubted whether Shakespeare has not suffered more than he has gained by the genius of latter-day actresses, who bring into the plays a realism and a robust emotion which sometimes obscure the sheer poetic value of the author's conception. The boys were no doubt very highly trained, and amenable to instruction; so that the parts of Rosalind and Desdemona may well have been rendered with a clarity and simplicity which served as a transparent medium for the author's wit and pathos. Poetry, like religion, is outraged when it is made a platform for the exhibition of their own talent and passion by those who are its ministers. With the disappearance of the boy-players the poetic drama died in England, and it has had no second life.

The effects of the poetic imagination are wrought largely by suggestion; and the bare stage, by sparing the audience a hundred irrelevant distractions, helped poetry to do its work. Besides poetry, the resources that lay to Shakespeare's hand were costume, gesture, dramatic grouping of the actors, procession, music, dancing, and all kinds of bodily activity. The rude architectural background supplied by the stage was not felt to be insufficient; much of the business of life was transacted by Elizabethans, as it still is by Orientals, "in an open place." Costume was something more than idly decorative; it was a note of rank, profession, or trade, and so helped to tell the story. The necessary outlay on costume was the heaviest part of theatrical expense, and the chief actors were furnished with a varied and splendid wardrobe. Shakespeare's plays are written with unfailing care for these externals. He entertained the spectators with

unceasing movement, and a feast of colours, and the noise of trumpets and cannon and shouting, and endless song and dance Sometimes a whole scene is given over to pageantry, like that scene in *As You Like It*, where Jaques and the Lords, clad as foresters, bear the deer in triumph, and crown the conqueror with the deer's horns. They form a procession, and pass round the stage, singing a lusty song:

> Take thou no scorn to wear the horn;
> It was a crest ere thou wast born.

The horn was a jest long before the time of Shakespeare, and he took no scorn to repeat it everlastingly, for the delight of a simple-minded audience. But the chief purpose of the scene is explained by Jaques, who calls for the song, and adds "Tis no matter how it be in tune, so it make noise enough"

The vigilance of Shakespeare's stage-craft may be best seen by an illustration In the Second Act of *Julius Caesar* the conspiracy against Caesar is hatched. The act opens with the appearance of Brutus, who comes into his orchard to call for his servant. We are to know that it is night, and we are told at once; Brutus speaks of the progress of the stars, and, being unable to sleep, orders a light to be set in his study. His servant, returning brings him a paper, found in the study-window it is a message from the conspirators, and he opens it and reads it. But we are not to forget that it is dark and he explains.

> The exhalations whizzing in the air
> Give so much light that I may read by them.

From the talk of Brutus and his servant we have learned that it is the night before the Ides of March, that Brutus is sleepless and troubled, and that the sky is full of portents. Before this talk is ended

assumed that a hush has fallen upon the audience; the murmur of voices and the cracking of nuts have ceased. Then comes a knocking at the gate, and Cassius is admitted with his fellow-conspirators, who wear their hats plucked about their ears, and are so muffled up that Brutus cannot identify them. He is introduced to them, one by one, and Cassius draws him aside for a long whispered colloquy. Meantime the others discuss the points of the compass:

Decius. Here lies the East: doth not the day break here?
Casca. No.
Cinna. O, pardon, Sir, it doth; and yon grey lines,
That fret the clouds, are messengers of day.
Casca. You shall confess that you are both deceiv'd:
Here, as I point my sword, the Sun arises,
Which is a great way growing on the South,
Weighing the youthful season of the year.
Some two months hence up higher toward the North
He first presents his fire, and the high East
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here.

The muffled figures are grouped at one corner of the protruding stage, behind Casca, who points at the imagined Capitol with his sword. Brutus and Cassius watch them, and the dramatic group breaks up at a word from Brutus:

Give me your hands all over, one by one.

Then follows a discussion of the plot against Caesar, until the clock strikes three, and the conspirators part. Brutus, left alone, finds that his servant has gone to sleep. The whole scene is heavy with the sense of night and the darkness of conspiracy, yet the effect is produced by nothing but the spoken words and the gestures of the players.

Not only was Shakespeare's stage bare, but the story

of the play was often unknown beforehand to his audience. The background and environment of his principal characters had to be created in the imagination of the spectators, worked upon and excited by his poetry. His opening scenes are therefore all-important; besides explaining preliminaries they often strike the keynote of the whole play. *Twelfth Night*, a play compact of harmony, opens with the strains of music, and when the music ceases the wonderful speech of the Duke on love and imagination is a summary of all that follows. In *Romeo and Juliet*, before either of the lovers is heard of we witness a quarrel between the servants of the rival houses. The first words spoken in *Hamlet* are a challenge to the sentry who guards the castle of Elsinore; *Macbeth* begins with a thunderstorm and rumours of battle, and the [illegible] of the witches. Not less wonderful and dense is the [illegible] of *Othello*, the midnight [illegible] in the street, of money and preferment and private grudges, are the muttering of the storm which breaks with tropical violence in the [illegible] storm, and is lulled into quiet again in the Council Chamber of the Duke. But this cloud is only the vanguard of the darkness that is to follow, and of the winds that are to blow till they have wakened death. The development of Shakespeare's greater plays is curiously musical in its logic; the statement and interweaving of the themes, the variations and repetitions, the quiet melodies that are heard in the intervals, and the gradual increase of complexity until the subtle discourse of the earlier scenes is swallowed up in the full blare of the reunited orchestra

No detail of the business of a playwright escaped his attention. His management of entrances deserves careful study. The actors came on at the back of the stage, and had some way to go before they could begin to speak. He allows time for this, and "Look where he comes"—the common formula of introduction—is usually spoken by one of the characters who is drawn a little aside, watching another come forward. So in *Othello*, when Iago's poison has begun to work:

Iago. Look where he comes. Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

This superb incantation is uttered by the high-priest of evil over the unconscious Othello as he comes moodily down the stage. Many modern editions of Shakespeare postpone the entrance of Othello until Iago's speech is finished, whereby they ruin the dramatic effect. The habitual shifting of the entrances to suit the requirements of the modern stage, where most of the characters must come on from the wings, is an evil departure from the old copies, and a wrong done to Shakespeare. On his platform stage he often introduces independent groups of actors, and makes one group serve as a commentary on the other. At the beginning of *Antony and Cleopatra* Demetrius and Philo are discussing the dotage of their great general. There is a flourish; Antony and Cleopatra, with their trains, and eunuchs fanning her, come slowly down the stage on the other side. Then Philo continues:

Look where they come.
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see.

By this time the procession has come forward and we overhear the talk of the lovers. Throughout the scene Demetrius and Philo have no share in the action; they stand aside and play the part of a chorus; their conversation interprets to the audience the meaning of what is going forward on the stage.

Where the action is so complex as it commonly is in Shakespeare's plays, a great part of it must necessarily be set forth in report or narration. He divides the ancient functions of the messenger, like those of the chorus, among the characters of the play. Many of his most memorable scenes—the wedding of Petruchio, the death of Ophelia, the interview of Hotspur, on the field of battle, with the popinjay lord,—are narrated, not exhibited. Yet for all his use of this indirect method, Shakespeare puts too much on his stage, and sometimes violates the modesty of art. To his audience he must have seemed notable for restraint; they were inured to horrors; and he gave them no hangings, and no slow deaths by torture *Titus Andronicus* may be left out of the account, as a work of youthful bravado. But the blinding of Gloucester on the stage, though casuistry has been ready to defend it, cannot be excused. This is the chief of his offences; in comparison with this the bringing in of the hot irons, in *King John*, and the murder of Macduff's young son, in *Macbeth*, are venial transgressions, which may be happily slurred over in the acting

The day for discussing the notorious unities in connection with Shakespeare's drama is long past. Romantic poetry created its own drama, and acknowledges no unity save that which is equally binding on a poem or a prose story—the unity of impression. Nowhere is the magic of Shakespeare's art greater

CHAPTER V

STORY AND CHARACTER

In the Folio Shakespeare's work is divided into three kinds—Comedy, History, and Tragedy. The classification of the plays under these headings is artificial and misleading. *Cymbeline* appears among the Tragedies; while *Measure for Measure*, a play much more tragic in temper, is numbered with the Comedies. *Richard II.* is a History; *Julius Caesar* is a Tragedy. *Troilus and Cressida*, in consequence of some typographical mishap, was inserted, with the pages unnumbered, between the Histories and the Tragedies.

The section headed Histories contains the historical plays dealing with English kings. This sort of play, the Chronicle History, flourished during the last fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign, and owed its popularity to the fervour of Armada patriotism. The newly awakened national spirit made the people quick to discern a topical interest in the records of bygone struggles against foreign aggression and civil disunion. In writing plays of this kind Shakespeare was following the lead of others; and the plays themselves, because they are based to a large extent on earlier dramatic handlings of the same themes, and frequently sacrifice the truth of history to the exigencies of the drama, are a less faithful record of facts than the Roman plays which derive solely from Plutarch. Doubtless where national memories were

concerned, the audience at the theatre was content with a comparatively diffuse style of play; and this looseness of structure, which is found in the weaker Histories, is the sole justification for the new name. But the threefold division has no value for dramatic criticism. The Histories were an accident of fashion, and claimed some measure of exemption, by virtue of their political interest, from the severer canons of art. At least they told a story, and the playgoers asked no more.

Even the time-honoured distinction of Tragedy and Comedy gives no true or satisfying division of Shakespeare's plays. *Othello* is a tragedy; *As You Like It* is a comedy: so much may be admitted. But between the most marked examples of the two kinds there is every degree and variety of tragic and comic interest, exhibited in rich confusion; so that the plays might be best arranged on a graduated scale; comedy shades into tragedy by imperceptible advances, and he would be a bold man who should presume to determine the boundary. The crude test of life or death gives no easy criterion; in *The Winter's Tale* Mamillius, heir to the throne of Sicily, only son to Hermione, and one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's children, dies of grief and fear. Romeo and Juliet die, Troilus and Cressida survive. In some of the comedies the gravest infidelities and sufferings are lightly huddled up in a happy ending. Further, Shakespeare has no two styles for the two kinds of play. The echoes that pass from the one to the other would make a strange collection. Benedick and Hamlet speak the same tongue. "If a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monuments, than the bell rings and the widow weeps." So says jesting Benedick, at the height of his new-found

happiness with Beatrice. "Oh Heavens!" says Hamlet, in the bitterness of his soul, "die two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year: but by'r lady, he must build churches then, or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse." If Hamlet is a philosopher, so is Benedick. "Is it not strange," he says of music, "that sheeps' guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" Another of these echoes passes from Justice Shallow to King Lear. "'Tis the heart, Master Page," says the thin-voiced little justice; "'tis here, 'tis here. I have seen the time, with my long sword, I would have made you four tall fellows skip like rats." How like to these are the words spoken by Lear, when he carries Cordelia dead in his arms; yet how unlike in effect:

> I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion,
> I would have made them skip: I am old now,
> And these same crosses spoil me.

All the materials and all the methods of Shakespeare's Tragedy are to be found dispersed in his Comedy. Most of his themes are indifferent, and no one could predict which of them he will choose for a happy ending. Nor is there reason to suppose that the public called at one time for comic stories, at another time for tragic, and that his plots were adapted to suit the demand. The real difference is in his own mood; the atmosphere and impression which give to each play its character are reflected from his own thought, and cannot be ranged under two heads to meet the mechanical requirements of criticism.

It is this which gives importance to the determination of the chronological order of the plays. Endless labour has been spent on the task; and although, in

this question, as in all others connected with Shakespeare, there is a tendency to overstate the certainty of the results, yet results of value have been obtained. Plays of the same type have been shown to fall within the same period of his life. His early boisterous Comedies and his prentice-work on history are followed by his joyous Comedies and mature Histories; these again by his Tragedies and painful Comedies; and last, at the close of his career, he reverts to Comedy, but Comedy so unlike the former kind, that modern criticism has been compelled to invent another name for these final plays, and has called them Romances. There is no escape from the broad lines of this classification. No single play can be proved to fall out of the company of its own kind. The fancies of those critics who amuse themselves by picturing Shakespeare as the complete tradesman have no facts to work upon. "One wonders," says Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, "what Heminge and Condell would have thought if they had applied to Shakespeare for a new comedy, and the great dramatist had told them that he could not possibly comply with their wishes, he being then in his Tragic Period." What they would have thought may admit a wide conjecture, what they got is less doubtful. If they asked for a comedy when he was writing his great tragedies they got *Measure for Measure* or *Troilus and Cressida*; if they asked for a tragedy when he was writing his happiest works of wit and lyric fantasy, they got *Romeo and Juliet*.

Shakespeare's Comedy is akin to his Tragedy, and does not come of the other house. The kind of Comedy which has been most famous and most influential in the world's history is satirical Comedy, which takes its stand on the best social usage, and laughs at the follies of idealists. Its feet are planted

firmly on the earth beneath, and it pays no regard to the heavens above, nor to the waters that are under the earth. Socrates and the founders of modern science are laughed out of court along with the half-witted fops and the half-crazy charlatans. But this is not Shakespeare's Comedy. His imagination is too active to permit him to find rest in a single attitude. His mind is always open to the wider issues, which reach out on all sides, into fantasy or metaphysic. He can study the life of his fellows as a man might study life on ship-board, and can take delight in the daily intrigues of the human family; but there is a background to the picture; he is often caught thinking of the sea, which pays no attention to good sense, and of the two-inch plank, which may start at any moment. Wit and good sense there is in plenty; and there is a woman, or a humourist, to show that wit and good sense are insufficient. Even in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Biron, the apostle of wit and good sense, is sent to jest for a twelvemonth in a hospital. In *The Merchant of Venice* the whole action of the play passes on the confines of tragedy, and is barely saved from crossing into the darker realm. On the leaden casket is engraved the motto of Shakespeare's philosophy: "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." Bassanio is not called upon to pay the full debt; but the voice of tragedy has been heard, as it is heard again in the passion of Shylock. The first breathings of tragic feeling, which are found even in the gayest of the early comedies, steadily increase in volume and intensity, until the storm rises, and blows all laughter out of the plays, except the laughter of the fool. It is as if Shakespeare were carried into tragedy against his will; his comedies, built on the old framework of clever trick and ludicrous misunderstanding, become

serious on his hands; until at last he recognises the position, cuts away all the mechanical devices whereby the semblance of happiness is vainly preserved, and *goes with open eyes to meet a trial that has become inevitable.*

The classic apparatus of criticism is not very well adapted to deal with this case. There is not a particle of evidence to show that Shakespeare held any views on the theory of the drama, or that the question was a live one in his mind. The species of play that he most affected in practice has been well described by Polonius; it is the "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited." His first care was to get hold of a story that might be shaped to the needs of the theatre. It is possible, no doubt, for a dramatist, as it is for a novelist, to go another way to work. He may conceive living characters, and devise events to exhibit them; or he may start with a moral, a philosophy of life, an atmosphere, a sentiment, and set his puppets to express it But Shakespeare kept *to the old road, and sought first for a story* Some of his characters were made by his story, as characters are made by the events of life. Others he permits to intrude upon the story, as old friends, or new visitors, intrude upon a plan and disorder it. His wisdom of life grew, a rich incrustation, upon the events and situations of his fable But the story came first with him,—as it came first with his audience, as it comes first with every child.

Those who have studied Shakespeare's plays with an eye to their making will ask for no proof of this. If proof were needed, it could be found in the incommodities and violences which are sometimes put upon him by the necessity of keeping to the story when the characters have come alive and are pulling another

ray. He spent no great care, one would say, on the original choice of a theme, but took it as he found it, if it looked promising. Then he dressed his characters, and put them in action, so that his opening scenes are often a kind of postulate, which the spectator or reader is asked to grant. At this point of the play improbability is of no account; the intelligent reader will accept the situation as a gift, and will become alert and critical only when the next step is taken, and he is asked to concede the truth of the argument—given these persons in this situation, such and such events will follow. Let it be granted that an old king divides his realm among his three daughters, exacting from each of them a profession of ardent affection. Let it be granted that a merchant borrows money of a Jew on condition that if he fail to repay it punctually he shall forfeit a pound of his own flesh. Let it be granted that a young prince sees a ghost, who tells him that his uncle, the reigning king, and second husband of his mother, is a murderer. The hypothetical preambles of *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet* are really much more elaborate than this, but this may serve to illustrate Shakespeare's method. Before appealing to the sympathies and judgment of his audience he has to acquaint them with the situation Until the situation is created he cannot get to wor on his characters. His plays open with a postulat then the characters begin to live, and, as Act follo Act, come into ever closer and more vital relation the course of events; till at last the play is clos sometimes triumphantly and inevitably, by exhibit the result of all that has gone before; at other ti feebly and carelessly, by neglecting the new inte that have grown around the characters, and drag the story back into its predestined shape.

If this be so, it makes some kinds of criticism idle. Why, it is often asked, did not Cordelia humour her father a little? She was too stubborn and rude, where tact and sympathetic understanding might, without any violation of truth, have saved the situation. It is easy to answer this question by enlarging on the character of Cordelia, and on that touch of obstinacy which is often found in very pure and unselfish natures. But this is really beside the mark; and those who spend so much thought on Cordelia are apt to forget Shakespeare. If Cordelia had been perfectly tender and tactful, there would have been no play. The situation would have been saved, and the dramatist who was in attendance to celebrate the sequel of the situation might have packed up his pipes and gone home. This is not to say that the character of Cordelia is drawn carelessly or inconsistently. But it is a character invented for the situation, so that to argue from the character to the plot is to invert the true order of things in the artist's mind. To go further, and discuss Cordelia's childhood as a serious question of criticism, is to lose all hold on the real dramatic problem, and to fall back among the idle people, who ask to be deceived, and are deceived. It would be as reasonable to attempt to judge a picture by considering all those things which might possibly have been included in it if the frame had been larger. The frame, which to the uninstructed gazer is a mere limitation and obstacle, hindering his wider view of reality, is to the painter the beginning and foundation and condition of all that appears within it.

In the great tragedies story and character are marvellously adapted to each other; hardly anything is forced or twisted to bring it within the limits of the scheme. By the time that he wrote *Lear* and *Othello*,

Shakespeare was a master craftsman, deeply acquainted with life, which had to be portrayed, and thoroughly exercised, by long practice, in the handling of all those dramatic schemes and patterns which had to be filled. But in his early comedies, and also, strangely enough, in his latest plays, the adaptation of story and character is less perfect. How lightly troubles find their solution in the comedies! In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Proteus, if we are to judge him by his deeds, is shallow and fickle, and false both to Valentine his friend, and to Julia, his affianced love. He is converted by being found out, at the end of the Fifth Act. A play must have an end, and this play is a comedy, so he makes an acceptable penitent. "My shame and guilt confounds me," he says, when Valentine has rescued Silvia from his violence. A few lines later he returns to his old love, and philosophises on inconstancy:

> What is in Silvia's face but I may spy
> More fresh in Julia's with a constant eye?

If he had thought of this before, it would have ruined the play. What hard heart will quarrel with an ending which gives us a double marriage,

> One feast, one house, one mutual happiness?

In *Twelfth Night* Viola alone, of all who fall in love, is honoured by being married to the first object of her affections; and it may perhaps be said, in Shakespeare's defence, that she alone deserves this particular honour. The rest are married, or kept single, much as silken strands are disposed in a gay pattern. These plays, after all, are comedies of intrigue; the pattern is very elaborate; and it would be ridiculous to discuss the characters seriously, were it not that Shakespeare has

worked so much of real and living character into the scheme, that we are emboldened thereby to ask him for the impossible. If all the characters are to live, the plot would have to be simpler and less symmetrical. All are, at least, most happily adapted to the light uses of comedy. The world in which they move is a rainbow world of love in idleness. The intensities and realities of life shimmer into smoke and film in that delicate air. The inhabitants are victims of love-fancy which is engendered in the eyes, youths and maidens who dally with the innocence of Love, votaries of Love,

> Who kissed his wings that brought him yesterday,
> And praise his wings to-day that he is flown.

In what other world were there ever so many witty lovers? In what other world were melancholy, and contempt, and anger, ever made to look so beautiful?

When Shakespeare has no further use for a character, he sometimes disposes of him in the most unprincipled and reckless fashion. Consider the fate of Antigonus in *The Winter's Tale*. Up to the time of his sudden death Antigonus has served his maker well; he has played an important part in the action, and by his devotion and courage has won the affection of all the spectators. It is he who saves the daughter of Hermione from the mad rage of the king. "I'll pawn the little blood which I have left," he says, "to save the innocent." He is allowed to take the child away on condition that he shall expose her in some desert place, and leave her to the mercy of chance. He fulfils his task, and now, by the end of the Third Act, his part in the play is over. Sixteen years are to pass, and new matters are to engage our attention; surely the aged nobleman might have been

allowed to retire in peace. Shakespeare thought otherwise; perhaps he felt it important that no news whatever concerning the child should reach Leontes, and therefore resolved to make away with the only likely messenger. Antigonus takes an affecting farewell of the infant princess; the weather grows stormy; and the rest must be told in Shakespeare's words:

Antigonus. Farewell;
The day frowns more and more: thou 'rt like to have
A lullaby too rough: I never saw
The heavens so dim by day. A savage clamour!
Well may I get aboard. This is the chase,
I am gone for ever! [*Exit pursued by a bear.*

This is the first we hear of the bear, and would be the last, were it not that Shakespeare, having in this wise disposed of poor Antigonus, makes a thrifty use of the remains at the feast of Comedy. The clown comes in to report, with much amusing detail, how the bear has only half-dined on the gentleman, and is at it now. It is this sort of conduct, on the part of the dramatist, that the word Romance has been used to cover. The thorough-paced Romantic critic is fully entitled to refute the objections urged by classic censors against Shakespeare's dramatic method; but if he profess to be unable to understand them, he disgraces his own wit.

The plot must be carried on, the interest and movement of the story maintained, at all costs, even if our sympathies are outraged by the wild justice that is done in the name of Comedy. The principal characters in *All's Well that Ends Well* are designed for their parts in the intrigue, but not even Shakespeare's skill can unite the incompatible, and teach them how to do their dramatic work without weakening their

claim on our sympathies. "I cannot reconcile my heart," says Johnson, "to Bertram, a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he *has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is* dismissed to happiness." And Claudio, in *Much Ado,* is a fair companion for him, a very ill-conditioned, self-righteous young fop, who is saved from punishment by the virtues of others and the necessities of the plot. It is a comfort to hear old Antonio speak his mind on him and his like:

> What, man! I know them, yea
> And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple,
> Scambling, out-facing, fashion-mongering boys,
> That lie and cog and flout, deprave and slander.

Nor does Beatrice leave her opinion doubtful.

But these are creatures judging a fellow-creature. What would the great artificer of them all have said, if he had been compelled to reply to Johnson's repeated accusation? "He sacrifices virtue," says Johnson again, "to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose." Would not Shakespeare have defended his characters with something of the large humorous tolerance displayed by Falstaff towards his ragged regiment? "Tell me, Jack," says the Prince, "whose fellows are these that come after?" "Mine, Hal, mine," says Falstaff, with wary geniality. "I did never see such pitiful rascals," says the Prince, who was a frank and fearless commentator. And then Falstaff, with one of those sudden reaches of imagination which disconcert the adversary by forcing

him off the narrow ground of his choice—"Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better: tush, man, mortal men, mortal men." Might not Shakespeare have replied in the same fashion to a critic of heroic leanings? His profligates and coxcombs fill a plot as well as better, and, when all is said, they are mortal men. Shakespeare's carelessness is a part of his magnanimity, and a testimony to his boundless resource.

If we sometimes find it hard to forgive him, it is partly because we are dissatisfied with the government of the world, and call out for "poetic justice," a narrow and rigid apportionment of rewards and punishments according to the dictates of the moral sense. Shakespeare moves in a larger scheme of things, where the sun rises on the evil and on the good. He finds it easy, therefore, to accept his story as a kind of providence, and to abide by its surprising awards. Why did he create so exquisite a being as Imogen for the jealous and paltry Posthumus? He has the precedent of nature, which makes many strangely-assorted matches; and he does not greatly care what we think of Posthumus. In the cases where he does care, where ill deeds are assigned by the story to one who must be kept dear and honourable, he rouses himself to magnificent effort. The story of *Othello* involved false suspicions, entertained by Othello on the testimony of slander, against his young and innocent wife, who had left her home and her country to follow him. If these suspicions grew in the normal fashion, and were nurtured by jealousy, there would be no tragedy, only another *Winter's Tale*. Shakespeare played for the higher stakes. From the first he makes Othello a man after his own heart, tender, generous, brave, and utterly

magnanimous. At the opening of the play, when the Senator Brabantio appears, with officers and torches, to take him, and the followers on both sides draw their weapons, the character of Othello is given, with thrilling effect, in a few words:

Othello Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
Good Signior, you shall more command with years,
Than with your weapons.

Fearlessness, the habit of command and of laconic speech, pride that would be disgraced by a street brawl, respect for law and humanity, reverence for age, and a touch of contempt for the folly that would pit itself, with a rabble of menials, against the General of the Republic and his bodyguard—all this is expressed in two lines. Everything that follows, up to the crisis of the play, helps to raise Othello to the top of admiration, and to fix him in the affections of the reader. Scene follows scene, and in every one of them, it might be said, Shakespeare is making his task more hopeless. How is he to fill out the story, and yet save our sympathies for Othello? The effort must be heroic: and it is. He invents Iago The greatness of Iago may be measured by this, that Othello never loses our sympathy. By slow and legitimate means, never extravagant, circumstance is added to circumstance, until a net is woven to take Othello in its toils. But circumstance is not his undoing Left to himself, even when the toils were closing in upon him, Othello would have rent them asunder, and shaken them off. When he grows impatient, and seems likely to break free, Iago is at hand, to keep him still, and compel him to think. On matters like these Othello cannot think; he is accustomed to impulse, instinct, and action; these tedious processes of arguing on dis-

honour are torture to him; and when he tries to think, he thinks wrong. His own account of himself is true:

> A man not easily jealous, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme.

There is not another of Shakespeare's plays which is so white-hot with imagination, so free from doubtful or extraneous matter, and so perfectly welded, as *Othello*. *Macbeth* has some weak scenes; *Hamlet* and *King Lear* are cast in a more variegated mould, so that the tension is sometimes relaxed and the heat abated; *Antony and Cleopatra* approaches, in some of its scenes, to the earlier chronicle manner. In general, it is true to say that Shakespeare cheerfully burdens himself with a plot which is either very complex, or very artificial, or both, and then goes to work to make a living thing of it. His care for probability is least in his latest plays. Towards the beginning of his career he wrote *The Comedy of Errors*, which is a story of two pairs of twin brothers, each pair so exactly alike that no one can tell them apart. Towards the close he wrote *Cymbeline*, of which Johnson speaks truly and moderately when he says: "This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation."

The best and highest part of Shakespeare's imagination was not concerned, one is tempted to say, with plot-architecture. Any plot is good enough for him, if it leads him, by unlikely and tortuous ways, to a

real situation; and no sooner is he confronted with a real situation than his characters, invented, it may be, only to fill a place in the story, become live and convincing. Many a poet who pays more regard to proportion and verisimilitude finds that his characters, though they do and suffer nothing that does not arise simply and naturally from the development of the plot, have no breath in them, and lie dead upon his hands. Unity, severity of structure, freedom from excess, the beauties of simplicity and order,—these may be learned from the Greeks. But where can this amazing secret of life be learned? It is the miracle of Nature—not the Nature exalted by the schools as a model of thrift and restraint, but the true Nature, the goddess of wasteful and ridiculous excess, who pours forth without ceasing, at all times and in the most unlikely places, her enormous and extravagant gift of life. The story may be shapeless, grotesque, inanimate, like a stone rejected by the curious builders who seek for severity of form. But Nature does not despise it.

> How long does it lie,
> The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
> Before encroached on and encompassed round
> With minute moss, weed, wild-flower—made alive
> By worm and fly and foot of the free bird?

It is thus that Shakespeare works on a story, concealing its barren ugliness under the life of his own creation. It is impossible to say when he will suddenly put forth his vital power, and take away the breath of his readers by some astonishing piece of insight which defeats all expectation. He is most natural when he upsets all rational forecasts. We are accustomed to anticipate how others will behave in the matters that most nearly concern us; we seem to know what

we shall say to them, and to be able to forecast what they will say in answer. We are accustomed, too, to find that our anticipation is wrong; what really happens gives the lie to the little stilted drama that we imagined, and we recognise at once how poor and false our fancy was, how much truer and more surprising the thing that happens is than the thing that we invented. So it is in Shakespeare. His surprises have the same convincing quality; the word once said is known to have been inevitable, and the character ceases to be a character of fiction, controlled by the plot. We are watching the events of real life; from our hidden vantage-ground we see into the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies.

It will not be out of place to call to remembrance a few only of these splendid divinations.

Cleopatra has fallen into the power of Caesar, after the death of Antony. Caesar, in the measured terms of magnanimity befitting a professional conqueror, advises her to do nothing violent, and promises that she shall be honoured and consulted. "My master, and my lord!" says the Queen; to which Caesar makes gracious response, "Not so; Adieu," and goes out with his attendants. Then Cleopatra turns to her women:

> He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
> Be noble to myself.

And Iras, who sees the real situation no less truly, replies,

> Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,
> And we are for the dark.

These brief speeches, coming at the end of the long diplomatic interview, are like flashes of lightning discovering the perils of travellers among the Alps.

Macbeth, brought to bay within his castle, hears that the Queen is dead:

> *Macbeth.* She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.

Desdemona has suddenly had revealed to her, beyond all hope of mistake, what it is that Othello believes. He has "laid such despite and heavy terms upon her as true hearts cannot bear," and has left her. Emilia, grieved and solicitous, stays by her mistress:

> *Emil.* How do you, Madam? How do you, my good Lady?
> *Des.* Faith, half asleep.
> *Emil.* Good Madam, what's the matter with my Lord?
> *Des.* With who?
> *Emil.* Why, with my Lord, Madam.
> *Des.* Who is thy Lord?
> *Emil.* He that is yours, sweet Lady
> *Des.* I have none do not talk to me, Emilia.
> I cannot weep: nor answers have I none
> But what should go by water.

Othello, coming into the bedchamber of his sleeping wife, looks upon that picture of innocence and beauty, and, lest he should be overcome by it, clutches at his failing resolve:

> *Othello.* It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars;
> It is the cause.

So swift and certain is Shakespeare's insight, that he has often puzzled his licensed interpreters. The actor Fechter, finding no sense in these words, caused Othello to take up a toilet-glass, fallen from Desdemona's hand, and, gazing therein on the image of his bronzed face, to exclaim, "It is the cause."

we shall say to them, and to be able to forecast what they will say in answer. We are accustomed, too, to find that our anticipation is wrong; what really happens gives the lie to the little stilted drama that we imagined, and we recognise at once how poor and false our fancy was, how much truer and more surprising the thing that happens is than the thing that we invented. So it is in Shakespeare. His surprises have the same convincing quality; the word once said is known to have been inevitable, and the character ceases to be a character of fiction, controlled by the plot. We are watching the events of real life; from our hidden vantage-ground we see into the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies.

It will not be out of place to call to remembrance a few only of these splendid divinations.

Cleopatra has fallen into the power of Caesar, after the death of Antony. Caesar, in the measured terms of magnanimity befitting a professional conqueror, advises her to do nothing violent, and promises that she shall be honoured and consulted. "My master, and my lord!" says the Queen; to which Caesar makes gracious response, "Not so; Adieu," and goes out with his attendants. Then Cleopatra turns to her women:

> He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
> Be noble to myself.

And Iras, who sees the real situation no less truly, replies,

> Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,
> And we are for the dark.

These brief speeches, coming at the end of the long diplomatic interview, are like flashes of lightning discovering the perils of travellers among the Alps.

Macbeth, brought to bay within his castle, hears that the Queen is dead:

> *Macbeth.* She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.

Desdemona has suddenly had revealed to her, beyond all hope of mistake, what it is that Othello believes. He has "laid such despite and heavy terms upon her as true hearts cannot bear," and has left her. Emilia, grieved and solicitous, stays by her mistress:

> *Emil.* How do you, Madam? How do you, my good Lady?
> *Des.* Faith, half asleep.
> *Emil.* Good Madam, what's the matter with my Lord?
> *Des.* With who?
> *Emil.* Why, with my Lord, Madam.
> *Des.* Who is thy Lord?
> *Emil.* He that is yours, sweet Lady.
> *Des.* I have none: do not talk to me, Emilia.
> I cannot weep: nor answers have I none
> But what should go by water.

Othello, coming into the bedchamber of his sleeping wife, looks upon that picture of innocence and beauty, and, lest he should be overcome by it, clutches at his failing resolve:

> *Othello.* It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars;
> It is the cause.

So swift and certain is Shakespeare's insight, that he has often puzzled his licensed interpreters. The actor Fechter, finding no sense in these words, caused Othello to take up a toilet-glass, fallen from Desdemona's hand, and, gazing therein on the image of his bronzed face, to exclaim, "It is the cause."

Garrick himself, with no better understanding, wrote a dying speech for Macbeth, beginning,

'Tis done; the scene of life will quickly close;

and delivered it, with suitable death-agonies, to thronged audiences. This sort of thing makes every lover of Shakespeare willing, so far as the great tragedies are concerned, to forswear the theatre altogether.

The truth is that his best things are not very effective on the stage. These packed utterances are glimpses merely of the hurry of unspoken thought; they come and are gone; they cannot be delivered emphatically, nor fully understood in the pause that separates them from the next sentence; and when they are understood, the reader feels no desire to applaud; he is seized by them, his thoughts are set a-working, and he is glad to be free from the importunacy of spectacle and action. Tragedy has no monopoly of them; wherever the situation becomes tense, the surprises of reality intrude. Falstaff is cast off, publicly disgraced and banished, by his old companion, now King Henry V. He stands among the crowd at the Coronation ceremony, by the side of Justice Shallow, whom he has cheated of money, duped with promises of Royal favour, and despised; he listens to the severe judgment of the King, and, when it is ended, watches the retreating procession. What trick, what device, has he now, to hide him from this open and apparent shame? If we did not know it from Shakespeare, we could never have guessed how Falstaff would take the rebuff. He turns quite simply to his companion, and says, "Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound." It is something to be a humourist, trained by habit to recognise

the incongruity of facts. No less convincing is the acquiescence of Parolles, when his cowardice and *treachery are brought home to him:*

> Yet am I thankful; if my heart were great,
> 'Twould burst at this: Captain I'll be no more,
> But I will eat, and drink, and sleep as soft
> As Captain shall. Simply the thing I am
> Shall make me live.

Shakespeare dared to follow his characters into those dim recesses of personality where the hunted soul stands at bay, and proclaims itself, naked as it is, for a greater thing than law and opinion.

Perhaps the vitalising power of Shakespeare is best seen in the loving care that he sometimes spends on subsidiary characters, whose connection with the plot is but slight. The young Osric, in *Hamlet*, has no business in the play except to carry Laertes' challenge to Hamlet. Shakespeare draws his portrait; we learn that he is a landowner, and perceive that he is an accomplished courtier. Hamlet and Horatio discuss him at some length, and his own speech shows how seriously he is preoccupied with all the etiquette and formality of Court life. He exists, it cannot be doubted, merely as a foil for Hamlet's wit and melancholy. When the mind is wholly taken up with tragic issues, when it is brooding on a great sorrow, or foreboding a hopeless event, the little daily affairs of life continue unaltered, tables are served, courtesies interchanged, and the wheels of society revolve at their accustomed pace. Osric is the representative of society; his talk is of gentility, skill in fencing, and the elegance of the proffered wager. How distant and dream-like it all seems to Hamlet, and to those who are in his secret! But this trivial society is real

and necessary, and strong with the giant strength of custom and institution. Shakespeare demonstrates its reality by showing us a live inhabitant. He might have entrusted the challenge to a walking-gentleman, and concluded the business in a few lines. By making a scene of it, he adds a last touch of pathos to the loneliness of Hamlet, and gives a last opportunity for the display of that incomparable vein of irony.

A stranger testimony to the wealth of his creative genius may be found in its superfluous creations. Some of his characters incommode him by their vitality, and even refuse the duties for which they were created. Barnardine, in *Measure for Measure*, is one of these rebels. In the Italian original of the story Isabella, to save the life of her brother, yields to the wicked deputy, who thereupon breaks his promise, and causes Claudio to be executed in the prison. George Whetstone, who handled the story before Shakespeare, mitigated one of these atrocities; in his version the gaoler is persuaded to substitute the head of a newly executed criminal for the head of Claudio. In Shakespeare's play we find, along with Claudio, a prisoner called Barnardine, who is under sentence of death, and is designed to serve as Claudio's proxy. He is a Bohemian born, "a man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, or to come; insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal." All arrangements are made for the substitution, and Barnardine is called forth to his death. Then a strange thing happens. Barnardine, a mere detail of the machinery, comes alive, and so endears himself to his maker, that his execution is felt to be impossible. Even the murderer of Antigonus has not the heart to put Barnardine to death. A way

out must be found; the disguised Duke suggests that Barnardine is unfit to die, and the Provost comes in with the timely news that a pirate called Ragozine, who exactly resembles Claudio, has just died in the prison of a fever. So Barnardine, who was born to be hanged, is left useless in his cell, until at the close of the play he is kindly remembered and pardoned. The plot is managed without him; yet, if he were omitted, he would be sadly missed. He is a fine example of the aristocratic temper. In that over-heated atmosphere of casuistry and cowardice he alone is self-possessed and indifferent. He treats the executioner like his valet: "How now, Abhorson? What's the news with you?" His decision of character is absolute: "I will not consent to die this day, that's certain." Those who speak to him, Duke and tapster alike, assume the deprecating tone of inferiors. "But hear you ——" says the Duke, and is interrupted: "Not a word: if you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I to-day." So the Bohemian goes back, to hold his court in the straw. It is a wonderful portrait of the gentleman vagabond, and is presented by Shakespeare to his audience, a perfect gratuity.

Some of the most famous characters in the plays are in a like case with Barnardine; Shakespeare loves them, and portrays them so sympathetically that they engage the interest of the audience beyond what is required (almost beyond what is permitted) by the general trend of the story. The diverse interpretations given by notable actors to the part of Shylock have their origin in a certain incongruity between the story that Shakespeare accepted and the character of the Jew as it came to life in his hands. Some actors, careful for the story, have laid stress on revenge,

cunning, and the thirst for innocent blood. Others, convinced by Shakespeare's sympathy, have presented so sad and human a figure that the verdict of the Court is accepted without enthusiasm, Portia seems little better than a clever trickster, and the actor of Gratiano, who is compelled to exult, with jibe and taunt, over the lonely and broken old man, forfeits all favour with the audience. The difficulty is in the play. The Jew of the story is the monster of the mediæval imagination, and the story almost requires such a monster, if it is to go with ringing effect on the stage. Shylock is a man, and a man more sinned against than sinning. He is one of those characters of Shakespeare whose voices we know, whose very tricks of phrasing are peculiar to themselves. Antonio and Bassanio are pale shadows of men compared with this gaunt, tragic figure, whose love of his race is as deep as life; who pleads the cause of a common humanity against the cruelties of prejudice; whose very hatred has in it something of the nobility of patriotic passion; whose heart is stirred with tender memories even in the midst of his lament over the stolen ducats; who, in the end, is dismissed, unprotesting, to insult and oblivion.

> I pray you give me leave to go from hence:
> I am not well. Send the deed after me,
> And I will sign it.

So ends the tragedy of Shylock, and the air is heavy with it long after the babble of the love-plot has begun again. The Fifth Act of *The Merchant of Venice* is an exquisite piece of romantic comedy; but it is a welcome distraction, not a full solution. The revengeful Jew, whose defeat was to have added triumph to happiness, keeps possession of the play, and the

memory of him gives to these beautiful closing scenes an undesigned air of heartless frivolity.

The chief case of all is Falstaff, who was originally intended, so far as we can judge from the part assigned to him in the development of the plot, to be a coarse, fat, tavern rogue, dissolute, scurrilous, and worthless. But Shakespeare lent him all his own wit and some of his own metaphysic, and Falstaff became so potent in charm that we are bewitched with the rogue's company, and are more than half inclined to adopt his view of the titular hero of the epic, Prince Henry. "A good shallow young fellow," says Falstaff; "'a would have made a good pantler; 'a would have chipped bread well." This view, accepted, makes nonsense of the whole structure of the play; and Shakespeare comes very near to making nonsense of it for the glorification of Falstaff. He saves himself by forcible, not to say violent, means, after preparing the way in the unnatural and pedantic soliloquy of the Prince:

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyok'd humour of your idleness:
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,

—and so on, for twenty lines or more, like the induction of a bald Morality play Truly, a plot is in a poor case when it sets up defences like this against the artillery of Falstaff's criticism and humour, and the insidious advances of his good-fellowship.

In these great instances Shakespeare's fecundity of imagination somewhat confuses the outlines of the design, and distracts the sympathies of the audience. Without direction given to sympathy, a play is not a play, but a chaos or patchwork. The Greeks secured unity by means of the Chorus, which mediates between

the actors and the spectators, bespeaking attention, interpreting events, and guiding the feelings. Shakespeare had no Chorus, but he attains the same end in another way. In almost all his plays there is a clear enough point of view; there is some character, or group of characters, through whose eyes the events of the play must be seen, if they are to be seen in right perspective. Some of his creatures he keeps nearer to himself than others. The meaning of *Love's Labour 's Lost* cannot be read through the eyes of Armado, nor that of *Twelfth Night* through the eyes of Malvolio. What comes of regarding the play of *Hamlet* from the point of view of Polonius? A hundred critical essays and dissertations on the symptoms of madness; but no understanding, and no sympathy with Shakespeare. Moreover, the point of view gradually shifts as the years pass by. It would be vain to attempt to read *Romeo and Juliet* from the standpoint of Lady Capulet; even so calm and experienced a guide as Friar Laurence cannot lead us to the heart of the play. On the other hand, *The Tempest*, or *The Winter's Tale*, cannot be read aright by those whose sympathies are concentrated on Miranda and Ferdinand, or on Florizel and Perdita. Heine, speaking of Juliet and Miranda, likens them to the sun and moon. Moonlight, it may be added, is reflected sunlight; and the ethereal quality of Miranda's beauty is the quality belonging to a reflection. We sympathise with Miranda and Ferdinand, but it is not their passion that we feel, rather it is the benevolence and wisdom of Prospero rejoicing in their passion. Miranda, that is to say, is Prospero's Miranda. No woman ever appeared thus to her lover —so completely unsophisticated, so absolutely simple. She is compact, says Mrs. Jameson, of the very elements of womanhood; and it is this elemental

character which appeals, more than anything individual or distinctive, to the imagination of mature age.

Shakespeare's plays are works of art, not chronicles of fact. There is always a centre of interest. Some of the characters are kept in the full light of this area of perfect vision. Others, moving in the outer field of vision, have no value save in relation to this centre. His habit of over-crowding his canvas is sometimes detrimental to the main impression. Edmund's love-intrigues, for instance, in *King Lear*,—who does not find them a tedious piece of machinery? They belong to the story, but they do not help the play. For the most part, and in the most carefully ordered of the plays, the subsidiary characters and events are used to enhance the main impression. They have no full and independent existence; they are seen only in a limited aspect, and have just enough vitality to enable them to play their allotted part in the action.

A great part of the character-study which is so much in vogue among Shakespeare critics is vitiated by its neglect of this consideration The critics must needs be wiser than Shakespeare, and must finish his sketches for him, telling us more about his characters than ever he knew. They treat each play as if it were a chessboard, and work out problems that never entered into his imagination. They alter the focus, and force all things to illustrate this detail or that. They plead reverence for Shakespeare's omniscience, and pay a very poor compliment to his art A play is like a piano, if it is tuned to one key, it is out of tune for every other. The popular saying which denies all significance to the play of *Hamlet* with the Prince of Denmark left out, shows a just sense of this. Yet the study of the lesser characters, conceived in relation, not to Hamlet, but to one another, continues

to exercise the critics. The King in *Hamlet* is little better than a man of straw. He is sufficiently realised for Shakespeare's purpose; we see him through Hamlet's eyes, and share Hamlet's hatred of him. His soliloquy in the scene where Hamlet discovers him praying is merely plausible; its rhyming tag would lose nothing if it were spoken by a chorus and addressed to the audience:

> His words fly up, his thoughts remain below:
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

His murder of his brother, his usurpation, and his wooing of the Queen, are all shown to us as they affected Hamlet after the event; to discuss them in any other light is idle. When Shakespeare intended a full-length portrait of a murderer, he wrote *Macbeth*, in which play Malcolm and Donalbain, the lawful heirs to the crown, fall into the background and are subordinated to the central interest.

Even in the comedies, where the interest is less concentrated than in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, some of the chief figures are no more than accessory. Bassanio, for instance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, must not be judged by critical methods which are fair when applied to Romeo. There is barely room for him in the central part of the picture. He is sketched lightly and sufficiently in his twofold aspect, as Antonio's friend and Portia's suitor. He is a careless and adventurous young gallant; the type was familiar, and was easy to suggest by a few outlines. Wealth is the burden of his wooing dance, as it was of Petruchio's. Only in the casket scene does he put on a fuller semblance of thought and emotion, and this, no doubt, was the dramatist's tribute to Portia, whose surrender of herself is made in words so beautiful and moving that

the situation would become almost painful if Bassanio were not furnished with his response from the same rich store of poetry. His character, his motives, his merits and defects as Portia's husband—these will continue to be the theme of countless essays. The embroidery of Shakespeare has become a national industry, harmless enough so long as it is not mistaken for criticism. But even good critics sometimes permit themselves the dangerous assumption that Shakespeare's meaning is not written broad on the play:

> And thus do they of wisdom and of reach
> With windlasses and with assays of bias,
> By indirections find directions out.

What they fail to remark is that in the very act of rescuing buried meanings, alleged to be all-important, they are condemning the work of the playwright. Shakespeare is subtle, fearfully and wonderfully subtle; and he is sometimes obscure, lamentably obscure But in spite of all this, most of his plays make a distinct and immediate impression, by which, in the main, the play is to be judged The impression is the play..

The analysis and illustration of Shakespeare's characters, considered separately, has had so long a vogue, and has produced work so memorable, that we are in some danger of forgetting how partial such a method must be. The heroines of the several plays are often taken out of their dramatic setting to be compared one with another. There was never a more delightful pastime. But let it be remembered how we come by our knowledge of these characters Rosalind we know in the sweet vacancy of the forest of Arden. we see Isabella only at the direst crisis of her history. Portia and Julia are overheard talking to their maids: Ophelia has no confidential friend, unless the brotherly lecture

of Laertes be regarded as an invitation to confidence. Hermia and Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are the sport of the fairies; Katherine, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, is the victim of human experiment. The marvellous art of Shakespeare presents each of these in so natural a guise that we forget the slightness of our acquaintance, and the exceptional nature of our opportunities. We seem to know them all, and to be able to predict how each of them will act in trials to which she cannot be exposed. What if Desdemona had been Lear's daughter, and Cordelia Othello's wife? Would not the sensitive affection of the one and the proud sincerity of the other have given us a different result? So we are lured further and further afield, until we find ourselves arguing on questions that have no meaning for criticism, and no existence save in dreams. It is well to go back to Shakespeare; and to remember the conditions imposed upon him, whether by the story of his choice, or by the necessities of dramatic presentment. No attempt can here be made to do more than select a few samples of his enormous riches, a few portraits from his gallery of character and a few topics from his treasury of thought. In either case the laws of the drama, which govern both, must not be neglected, even where they seem to relax their force. Some of his characters, it has been shown, tend to escape from their dramatic framework, and to assert their independence. In the same fashion, some of his favourite topics are treated with greater fullness and insistence than dramatic necessity can be proved to require, and so seem to reveal to us the preoccupations of his own mind. The thought that pleases him recurs in many settings. But the dramatic scheme comes first; for except in cases where it serves as a mere excuse, the scheme is the language of a playwright. As he grew

in power, Shakespeare made his scheme more and more adequate to express his thought, so that in his great tragedies there is no escape from it. Comedy, History, Tragedy, the old order of the plays, gives a true enough statement of the development of his art and the progress of his mind. What remains to say may therefore be loosely arranged in this order.

In the Comedies much is sacrificed to the story, and the implements of Shakespeare's comic stage—the deceits and mistakes and cross-purposes—are used to maintain suspense and prolong the interest. Criticism of human life occurs incidentally, but can hardly be said to dictate the plot, which, especially in the earlier Comedies, is sometimes as symmetrical and artificial as the plot of a comic opera. The audience, it is clear, were concerned chiefly with the event, and in his effort to hold their attention he often introduces a new complication when the main story has reached its natural close. So, in *The Merchant of Venice*, when happiness is full in sight, we are thrown back into uncertainty by the question of the rings. When the plot against Hero, in *Much Ado*, is successfully unravelled, she is not restored at once to Claudio; a new trick is devised, there is a scene of solemn lament for Hero, whom we know to be alive, and Claudio is offered, and accepts, the hand of another lady, who proves, in the last scene of all, to be his injured love. Those whose sympathies have been captured by the human situation may well feel some impatience with Shakespeare's habitually delayed solutions. It is an unpardonable indignity that is put upon Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, when the disguised Duke, who is by way of being the good angel of the piece, deludes her into thinking that her brother is dead, and keeps her crying her complaints

n the street, in order that he may play a game of cat and mouse with the wicked deputy. All this is done, he alleges, that the case against Angelo may proceed

By cold gradation and well-balanced form;

but the true reason for it is dramatic; the crisis must be kept for the end. So Isabella, who deserved to hear the truth, is sacrificed to the plot.

The stories chosen for the plots of the Comedies are such as are found in great plenty in the novels of the time. Some of them, as for instance the story of the *Comedy of Errors* or of *The Merry Wives*, do not differ in their main outlines from the witty anecdotes of the Jest-books. Men and women are exhibited as the victims of mirthful experiment, or of whimsical accident. The trickery and practical jesting which abound in these plays would hardly work out to a happy conclusion in real life. A joke in action too often leads to unexpected results, sometimes tragic, sometimes merely squalid. It is the expense of spirit in a waste of discomfort. Shakespeare supplies the good wit of the Hundred Merry Tales with live characters and a real setting, yet escapes the imputation of heartlessness. He so bathes his story in the atmosphere of poetry and fantasy, his characters are so high-spirited and good-tempered and resourceful, the action passes in such a tempest of boisterous enjoyment, and is mitigated by so many touches of human feeling, that the whole effect remains gracious and pleasant, and the master of the show is still the gentle Shakespeare. The characters of the pure Comedies are so confident in their happiness that they can play with it, and mock it, and put it to trials that would break fragility. They are equal to circumstance, and the most surprising adventures do

not disconcert nor depress them. In a sense they too, like the tragic heroes and heroines, are the antagonists of Fate. But Fate, in the realm of Comedy, appears in the milder and more capricious character of Fortune, whose wheel turns and turns again, and vindicates the merry heart. "Who can control his Fate?" says Othello. "'Tis but Fortune; all is Fortune," says Malvolio, when he believes himself to stand in favour with Olivia; "Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked" Olivia, ensnared by the beauty of the disguised Viola, gives voice to the same creed:

> I do I know not what, and fear to find
> Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind:
> Fate, show thy force; ourselves we do not owe;
> What is decreed, must be; and be this so.

And Viola, in like fashion, trusts to the event.

> O Time, thou must untangle this, not I,
> It is too hard a knot for me to untie.

The impulses and passions that shape man's life to happy or unhappy ends seem to owe their power to something greater than man, and refuse his control. Shakespeare gives them an independent life, and often embodies them in the supernatural beings who are exhibited on his stage. His witches and ghosts and fairies do not come uncalled; they are the shadows and reflections of the human mind, creatures of the mirror, who, by a startling and true psychology, are brought alive, released from the dominion of man's will, and established as his masters. Macbeth, excited by the dark hints of ambition, falls in with the witches, and thereafter is carried with fearful speed into an abyss of crime. Hamlet, saddened by the death of his father and tortured by the infidelity of his mother,

receives the message of the ghost, which brings his suspicions and broodings to a point, and makes him thenceforward an instrument in the hands of destiny. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the inexplicable whims and changes of inconstant love seem to be the work of the fairies, sporting, not malevolently, with human weakness. The desire of the eyes, which is the motive-power of Shakespeare's earlier romantic plays, is exhibited in many beautiful and fanciful guises, transforming itself into passion or caprice, and irresistibly leading its victims to unexpected goals. It creates its own values, and has no commerce with reason. The doctrine of this youthful love, in its lighter aspects, is set forth by Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
> Love can transpose to form and dignity;—

and is illustrated by the infatuation of Titania. It is expounded once more by the Duke in *Twelfth Night*:

> O spirit of Love, how quick and fresh art thou,
> That, notwithstanding thy capacity
> Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there
> Of what validity and pitch so e'er
> But falls into abatement and low price
> Even in a minute; so full of shapes is fancy,
> That it alone is high-fantastical.

But perhaps the best commentary on these younger plays is to be found in the famous lines wherein Marlowe, describing how Leander first saw Hero, pays his tribute to the "force and virtue of an amorous look."

> It lies not in our power to love or hate,
> For will in us is over-ruled by Fate.

When two are stripped, long ere the course begin
We wish that one should lose, the other win;
And one especially do we affect
Of two gold ingots, like in each respect.
The reason no man knows; let it suffice
What we behold is censured by our eyes.
Where both deliberate, the love is slight;
Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight!

The summons is as inevitable and unforeseen as that of death; it comes to all, clown and courtier, wayward youth and serious maiden, leading them forth on the dance of Love through that maze of happy adventure which is Shakespeare's Comedy. None refuses the call, none is studious to reckon the cost. Young gallants, with no intent to turn husband, go on the slightest errand to the Antipodes, and run to meet their fate. Delicate girls, brought up in seclusion and luxury, put on hose and doublet and follow their defaulting lovers to the wild-wood, or to the court of a foreign potentate. The disguises and mistaken identities which are a stock device of the Comedies do not recur in the Tragedies. Youth is eager to multiply events, and to quicken the pace of life. But the world, which seemed so slow to start, when once it is set a-going moves all too fast "I would set up my tabernacle here," says Charles Lamb in the gravest of his essays; "I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends; to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age, or drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave." These are the words of a man who knew the tragedy of life When Shakespeare, in the fullness of his powers, came to close grips with reality, he put away all those mechanical expedients wherewith he had enlivened his early Comedies He

too learned that in the duel with Fate man is not the hunter, but the game, and that a losing match nobly played is his only possible victory. The poet of *Lear* and *Othello* was the fitter for the contest in that he had known the illimitable happiness and buoyancy of youth. "O God," cries Hamlet, "I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space; were it not that I have bad dreams." The dream of the Midsummer Night was not one of these. The perfect temper of the earlier Comedies gives the warrant of reality to the later and darker plays; we are saved from the suspicion that the discords in the music are produced by some defect in the instrument, or that the night which descends on the poet is the night of blindness. His tragedies become more solemn when we remember that this awful vision of the world was shown to a man cast in the antique mould of humanity, equable, alert, and gay.

When the gaiety spent itself, and Shakespeare's mind was centred on tragic problems, the themes of his later and darker Comedies were still drawn from the old inexhaustible source. The Italian Novel, in its long and brilliant history from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, foreshadowed the development and change which is seen in Shakespeare's Comedies. It began with witty and fantastic anecdote, borrowed, in large part, from the scurrilities of French minstrels. By the genius of Boccaccio it was brought into closer touch with life. He retained many of the world-old jests, gross and impossible, but he intermixed them with another type of story, wherein he moves to pity and wonder by narrating memorable histories of passion. His chief sixteenth century disciples, to both of whom Shakespeare owed much, were Bandello and Cinthio. These men carried the novel still further

in the direction of realism. Bandello asserts that all his novels record events which happened in his own time; Cinthio also claims to base his stories on fact, and so handles them that they set forth difficult problems of human conduct. Novelists are much in the habit of pretending a moral purpose; but the plea of these Renaissance writers was primarily scientific. They claim to add to the materials for a science of human nature, which science may find later application in practice. They are the Machiavels of private life. In the new-found freedom of that age men were voyagers upon a treacherous unknown sea, and were glad to make acquaintance, in the chart supplied by the novelists, with the extreme possibilities of good and evil fortune, crime and disaster, heroism and attainment. For a life full of accident and adventure these stories furnished a body of precedent and case-law. Geoffrey Fenton, the English translator of Bandello, defends them on this ground He calls the novels "that excellent treasury and full library of all knowledge," and says that they yield us "precedents for all cases that may happen, both for imitation of the good, detesting the wicked, avoiding a present mischief, and preventing any evil afore it fall." "By the benefit of stories," he goes on, "presenting afore our eyes a true calendar of things of ancient date, by the commendation of virtuous and valiant persons and acts, we be drawn by desire to tread the steps of their renown. And, on the other side, considering the sinister fortune and horrible cases which have happened to certain miserable souls, we behold both the extreme points whereunto the frail condition of man is subject by infirmity; and also are thereby taught, by the view of other men's harms, to eschew the like inconveniences in ourselves." These more serious aspects of the Italian

novel are reflected in Shakespeare's graver Comedies, especially in *All's Well that Ends Well*, which is based on a story of Boccaccio, and in *Measure for Measure*, which borrows its plot from Cinthio. In these plays, as in *The Merchant of Venice*, questions of casuistry are at the root of the plot, and Shakespeare uses his theme in such a way as to suggest the lessons of his own subtle and profound morality. Both plays have been treated with some distaste by good critics, who have perhaps been repelled rather by the plots than by Shakespeare's handling of them. Of *Measure for Measure* Hazlitt says: "This is a play as full of genius as it is of wisdom. Yet there is an original sin in the nature of the subject, which prevents us from taking a cordial interest in it. . . . There is in general a want of passion; the affections are at a stand; our sympathies are repulsed and defeated in all directions." The feeling of repulsion is caused in part, no doubt, by the well-nigh intolerable dilemma which is the subject of the play. Of the alternatives presented to Isabella neither can be a matter for triumph; and Shakespeare himself evades the consequences of the choice. But it is also true that in this play, as in some others, Shakespeare is too wide and strong, too catholic in his sympathies and too generous in his acceptance of facts, for the bulk of his readers. His suburbs are not their suburbs; nor is his morality their morality. Hazlitt himself, in the best word ever spoken on Shakespeare's morals, has given the explanation. "Shakespeare," he says, "was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations." This is indeed the everlasting difficulty of Shake-

speare criticism, that the critics are so much more moral than Shakespeare himself, and so much less experienced. He makes his appeal to thought, and they respond to the appeal by a display of delicate taste. Most of those who have written on *Measure for Measure* are of one mind with the "several shabby fellows" of Goldsmith's comedy; they are in a concatenation with the genteel thing, and are unable to bear anything that is low. They cannot endure to enter such and such a place. They turn away their eyes from this or that person. They do not like to remember this or that fact. Their morality is made up of condemnation and avoidance and protest. What they shun in life they shun also in the drama, and so shut their minds to nature and to Shakespeare. The searching, questioning thought of the play does not find them out, and they are deaf to the commentary of the Duke:

Thou art not noble,
For all the accommodations that thou bear'st
Are nurs'd by baseness. . . . Thou art not thyself,
For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains
That issue out of dust.

The ready judgments which are often passed on Shakespeare's most difficult characters and situations are like the talk of children. Childhood is amazingly moral, with a confident, dictatorial, unflinching morality. The work of experience, in those who are capable of experience, is to undermine this early pedantry, and to teach tolerance, or at least suspense of judgment. Nor is this an offence done to virtue; rather virtue becomes an empty name, or fades into bare decorum, where sin is treated as a dark and horrible kind of eccentricity.

In criticisms of *Measure for Measure*, we are commonly

presented with a picture of Vienna as a black pit of seething wickedness; and against this background there rises the dazzling, white, and saintly figure of Isabella. The picture makes a good enough Christmas card, but it is not Shakespeare. If the humorous scenes are needed only, as Professor Dowden says, "to present without disguise or extenuation a world of moral licence and corruption," why are they humorous? The wretches who inhabit the purlieus of the city are live men, pleasant to Shakespeare. Abhorson, the public executioner, is infamous by his profession, and is redeemed from infamy by his pride in it. When Pompey, who has followed a trade even lower in esteem, is offered to him as an assistant, his dignity rebels: "A bawd, Sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery." Pompey himself, the irrelevant, talkative clown, half a wit and half a dunce, is one of those humble, cheerful beings, willing to help in anything that is going forward, who are the mainstay of human affairs. Hundreds of them must do their daily work and keep their appointments, before there can be one great man of even moderate dimensions. Elbow, the thick-witted constable, own cousin to Dogberry, is no less dutiful. Froth is an amiable, feather-headed young gentleman—to dislike him would argue an ill nature, and a small one. Even Lucio has his uses; nor is it very plain that in his conversations with the Duke he forfeits Shakespeare's sympathy. He has a taste for scandal, but it is a mere luxury of idleness; though his tongue is loose, his heart is simply affectionate, and he is eager to help his friend. Lastly, to omit none of the figures who make up the background, Mistress Overdone pays a strict attention to business, and is carried to prison in due course of law. This world of Vienna, as Shakespeare paints it,

is not a black world; it is a weak world, full of little vanities and stupidities, regardful of custom, fond of pleasure, idle, and abundantly human. No one need go far to find it. On the other side, over against the populace, are ranged the officers of the government, who are more respectable, though hardly more amiable. The Duke, a man of the quickest intelligence and sympathy, shirks his public duties, and plays the benevolent spy. He cannot face the odious necessities of his position. The law must be enforced, and the man who enforces it, putting off all those softer human qualities which are dearest to him, must needs maim himself, for the good of the social machine. So the Duke, like many a head of a family or college, tries to keep the love of the rebels by putting his ugly duties upon the shoulders of a deputy, and goes into exile to watch the case secretly from the opposition side. Shakespeare does not condemn him, but permits him to learn from the careless talk of Lucio that he has gained no credit by his default of duty. In his place is installed the strong man, the darling and idol of weak governments. The Lord Deputy, Angelo, is given sole authority, and is prepared to put down lust and licence with a firm hand, making law absolute, and maintaining justice without exception. His defence of the strict application of law, as it is set forth in his speeches to his colleague, Escalus, contains some of the finest and truest things ever said on that topic. He has no misgivings, and offers a convincing proof of the need for severity.

So the train is laid. Quietly and naturally, out of ordinary human material, by the operation of the forces of every day, there is raised the mount on which Claudio and Isabella are to suffer their agony. A question of police suddenly becomes a soul's

presented with a picture of Vienna as a black pit of seething wickedness; and against this background there rises the dazzling, white, and saintly figure of Isabella. The picture makes a good enough Christmas card, but it is not Shakespeare. If the humorous scenes are needed only, as Professor Dowden says, "to present without disguise or extenuation a world of moral licence and corruption," why are they humorous? The wretches who inhabit the purlieus of the city are live men, pleasant to Shakespeare. Abhorson, the public executioner, is infamous by his profession, and is redeemed from infamy by his pride in it. When Pompey, who has followed a trade even lower in esteem, is offered to him as an assistant, his dignity rebels: "A bawd, Sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery." Pompey himself, the irrelevant, talkative clown, half a wit and half a dunce, is one of those humble, cheerful beings, willing to help in anything that is going forward, who are the mainstay of human affairs. Hundreds of them must do their daily work and keep their appointments, before there can be one great man of even moderate dimensions. Elbow, the thick-witted constable, own cousin to Dogberry, is no less dutiful. Froth is an amiable, feather-headed young gentleman—to dislike him would argue an ill nature, and a small one. Even Lucio has his uses; nor is it very plain that in his conversations with the Duke he forfeits Shakespeare's sympathy. He has a taste for scandal, but it is a mere luxury of idleness; though his tongue is loose, his heart is simply affectionate, and he is eager to help his friend. Lastly, to omit none of the figures who make up the background, Mistress Overdone pays a strict attention to business, and is carried to prison in due course of law. This world of Vienna, as Shakespeare paints it,

is not a black world; it is a weak world, full of little vanities and stupidities, regardful of custom, fond of pleasure, idle, and abundantly human. No one need go far to find it. On the other side, over against the populace, are ranged the officers of the government, who are more respectable, though hardly more amiable. The Duke, a man of the quickest intelligence and sympathy, shirks his public duties, and plays the benevolent spy. He cannot face the odious necessities of his position. The law must be enforced, and the man who enforces it, putting off all those softer human qualities which are dearest to him, must needs maim himself, for the good of the social machine So the Duke, like many a head of a family or college, tries to keep the love of the rebels by putting his ugly duties upon the shoulders of a deputy, and goes into exile to watch the case secretly from the opposition side. Shakespeare does not condemn him, but permits him to learn from the careless talk of Lucio that he has gained no credit by his default of duty. In his place is installed the strong man, the darling and idol of weak governments. The Lord Deputy, Angelo, is given sole authority, and is prepared to put down lust and licence with a firm hand, making law absolute, and maintaining justice without exception. His defence of the strict application of law, as it is set forth in his speeches to his colleague, Escalus, contains some of the finest and truest things ever said on that topic. He has no misgivings, and offers a convincing proof of the need for severity.

So the train is laid. Quietly and naturally, out of ordinary human material, by the operation of the forces of every day, there is raised the mount on which Claudio and Isabella are to suffer their agony. A question of police suddenly becomes a soul's

tragedy. Claudio is in love with Juliet. Her friends are opposed to the match, and there has been no marriage ceremony: meantime, the lovers have met secretly, and Juliet is with child by him. The solution offered by Isabella is short and simple: "O, let him marry her." But the new and stricter reign of law has begun, old penalties have been revived, and Claudio must die. There is no appeal possible to the Duke, who has disappeared; and the one hope left is that Isabella may move the deputy to take pity on her brother. What she has to say is no answer to the reasons which have convinced Angelo that strict administration of the law is needful. The case contemplated has arisen, that is all. If, from tender consideration for the sinner, the law is to be defeated, will not the like considerations arise in every other case? It is worth remarking that Shakespeare hardly makes use of the best formal and casuistical arguments employed by Cinthio's heroine. After pleading the youth and inexperience of her brother, and discoursing on the power of love, the lady of the novel takes up the point of legality. The deputy, she says, is the living law; if his commands are merciful, they will still be legal. But the pleading of Isabella is for mercy as against the law. The logic of Angelo stands unshaken after her most eloquent assaults. He believes himself to be strong enough to do his duty; he has suppressed in himself all sensual pity, but sense is not to be denied, and it overcomes him by an unexpected attack from another quarter. The beauty and grace of Isabella, pleading the cause of guilty love, stir desire in him; and he propounds to her the disgraceful terms whereby Claudio's life is to be saved at the expense of her honour. She does not, even in thought, entertain the proposal for an instant, but

carries it to her brother in the prison, that her refusal may be reinforced by his. At the first blush, he joins in her indignant rejection of it. But when his imagination gets to work on the doom that is now certain, he pleads with her for his life. This is the last horror, and Isabella, in a storm of passion, withers Claudio by her contempt. "Let me ask my sister pardon," he says, when at last the Duke enters; "I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be rid of it." The rest of the play is mere plot, devised as a retreat, to save the name of Comedy.

Of all Shakespeare's plays, this one comes nearest to the direct treatment of a moral problem. What did he think of it all? He condemns no one, high or low. The meaning of the play is missed by those who forget that Claudio is not wicked, merely human, and fails only from sudden terror of the dark Angelo himself is considerately and mildly treated, his hypocrisy is self-deception, not cold and calculated wickedness. Like many another man, he has a lofty, fanciful idea of himself, and his public acts belong to this imaginary person. At a crisis, the real man surprises the play-actor, and pushes him aside. Angelo had under-estimated the possibilities of temptation:

> O cunning enemy, that to catch a saint
> With saints dost bait thy hook!

After the fashion of King Claudius in *Hamlet*, but with more sincerity, he tries to pray. It is useless, his old ideals for himself are a good thing grown tedious. While he is waiting for the interview with Isabella, the blood rushes to his heart, like a crowd round one who swoons, or a multitude pressing to the audience of a king The same giddiness is felt by Bassanio in the presence of Portia, and is described by

him in almost the same figures. When the wickedness of Angelo is unveiled, Isabella is willing to make allowances for him:

> I partly think
> A due sincerity governed his deeds,
> Till he did look on me.

But he is dismayed when he thinks of his fall, and asks for no allowance:

> So deep sticks it in my penitent heart,
> That I crave death more willingly than mercy;
> 'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

Shakespeare, it is true, does not follow the novel by marrying him to Isabella, but he invents Mariana for him, and points him to happiness.

Is the meaning of the play centred in the part of Isabella? She is severe, and beautiful, and white with an absolute whiteness. Yet it seems that even she is touched now and again by Shakespeare's irony. She stands apart, and loses sympathy as an angel might lose it, by seeming to have too little stake in humanity:

> Then Isabel live chaste, and brother die;
> More than our brother is our chastity.

Perhaps it is the rhyming tag that gives to this a certain explicit and repulsive calmness: at the end of his scenes Shakespeare often makes his most cherished characters do the menial explanatory work of a chorus. He treats Cordelia no better, without the excuse, in this case, of a scene to be closed:

> For thee, oppressed king, I am cast down;
> Myself could else outfrown false Fortune's frown.

When we first make acquaintance with her, Isabella is on the eve of entering a cloister; we overhear her talking to one of the sisters, and expressing a wish

that a more strict restraint were imposed upon the order. She is an ascetic by nature, and some of the Duke's remarks on the vanity of self-regarding virtue, though they are addressed to Angelo, seem to glance delicately at her. Shakespeare has left us in no doubt concerning his own views on asceticism; his poems and plays are full of eloquent passages directed against self-culture and the celibate ideal. In a wonderful line of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* he pictures the sisterhood of the cloister—

> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

There is a large worldliness about him which makes him insist on the doctrine of usury. Virtue, he holds, is empty without beneficence:

> No man is the lord of anything,
> Till he communicate his parts to others.

He goes further, and, in a great passage of *Troilus and Cressida,* teaches how worth and merit may not dare to neglect or despise their reflection in the esteem of men. No man can know himself save as he is known to others. Honour is kept bright by perseverance in action: love is the price of love. It is not by accident that Shakespeare calls Isabella back from the threshold of the nunnery, and after passing her through the furnace of trial, marries her to the Duke. She too, like Angelo, is redeemed for worldly uses; and the seething city of Vienna had some at least of Shakespeare's sympathy as against both the true saint and the false.

In this play there is thus no single character through whose eyes we can see the questions at issue as Shakespeare saw them. His own thought is interwoven in every part of it; his care is to maintain the balance,

and to show us every side. He stands between the gallants of the playhouse and the puritans of the city; speaking of charity and mercy to these; to those asserting the reality of virtue in the direst straits, when charity and mercy seem to be in league against it. Even virtue, answering to a sudden challenge, alarmed, and glowing with indignation, though it is a beautiful thing, is not the exponent of his ultimate judgment. His attitude is critical and ironical, expressed in reminders, and questions, and comparisons. When we seem to be committed to one party, he calls us back to a feeling of kinship with the other. He pleads for his creatures, as he pleads in the Sonnets for his friend:

> For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense;
> Thy adverse party is thy Advocate.

Measure for measure: the main theme of the play is echoed and re-echoed from speaker to speaker, and exhibited in many lights. "Plainly conceive, I love you," says Angelo; and quick as lightning comes Isabella's retort:

> My brother did love Juliet; and you tell me
> That he shall die for 't.

The law is strict; but the offence that it condemns is knit up with humanity, so that in choosing a single victim the law seems unjust and tyrannical. Authority and degree, place and form, the very framework of human society, are subjected to the same irony:

> Respect to your great place; and let the devil
> Be sometime honour'd for his burning throne.

The thought that was painfully working in Shakespeare's mind reached its highest and fullest expression in the cry of King Lear:

None does offend, none, I say none; I'll able 'em;
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power
To seal th' accuser's lips.

Many men make acquaintance with Christian morality as a branch of codified law, and dutifully adopt it as a guide to action, without the conviction and insight that are the fruit of experience. A few, like Shakespeare, discover it for themselves, as it was first discovered, by an anguish of thought and sympathy; so that their words are a revelation, and the gospel is born anew.

This wonderful sympathy, which, more than any other of his qualities, is the secret of Shakespeare's greatness, answers at once to any human appeal. With Lafeu, in *All's Well*, it says to Parolles, "Though you are a fool and a knave, you shall eat." It takes the road with the lighter-hearted hedgerow knave, Autolycus, and rejoices in his gains: "I see this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive." It travels backwards through the ages, and revives the solemn heroic temper of the Roman world. It crosses the barrier of sex, and thinks the thoughts, and speaks the language, of women.

Shakespeare's characters of women, as they are drawn even in his earliest plays, take us into a world unknown to his master Marlowe, with whom women are prizes or dreams. The many excellent essays that have been written on this topic make too much, perhaps, of individual differences among the heroines of the Comedies. Rosalind, Portia, Beatrice, Viola, are at least as remarkable for their similarities as for their differences. The hesitancy of Silvia, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, when she returns his letter to Valentine, anticipates the shy speech of Portia to Bassanio, or of Beatrice to Benedick: "It were as possible for me," says Beatrice, "to say I

loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not, and yet I lie not, I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing, I am sorry for my cousin." The scene, in the same play, where Julia makes a catalogue of her lovers for the criticism of Lucetta, is an earlier and fainter sketch of the conversation between Portia and Nerissa. Pope remarked that "every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike. Had all the speeches," he continues, "been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker." The remark is almost true as regards any single play; but it would be a difficult task indeed to appropriate to their speakers all the wit-sallies of Beatrice and Rosalind, or to distinguish character in every line of their speeches. Yet all alike are women; hardly anything that they speak in their own characters could have been spoken by men. It is possible to extract from the plays some kind of general statement which, if it be not universally true of women, is at least true of Shakespeare's women. They are almost all practical, impatient of mere words, clear-sighted as to ends and means. They do not accept the premises to deny the conclusion, or decorate the inevitable with imaginative lendings. "Never dream on infamy, but go," says the practical Lucetta to her mistress. When the steward in *All's Well* comes to the Countess with a long tale about the calendar of his past endeavours, and the wound done to modesty by those who publish their own deservings, she cuts through his web of speech at a blow: "What does this knave here? Get you gone, sirra: the complaints I have heard of you I do not all believe; 'tis my slowness that I do not." The same quickness of apprehension is seen in those many

passages where Shakespeare's women express their contempt for all the plausible embroidery of argument. Hermione, like Volumnia, feels it a disgrace to be compelled "to prate and talk for life and honour." Imogen, persecuted by the attentions of Cloten, and compelled repeatedly to answer him, offers a dainty apology:

> I am much sorry, Sir,
> You put me to forget a lady's manners,
> By being so verbal.

Virgilia is addressed by Coriolanus as "my gracious silence." Rosalind, Portia, Viola, though they are rich in witty and eloquent discourse, are frank and simple in thought; never deceived by their own eloquence. "I 'll do my best," says Viola to the Duke,

> To woo your Lady: yet a barful strife,
> Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife.

Helena in *All's Well*—the chief example of the pursuing woman who so often figures in the plays—has forfeited, by her practical energy and resource, the esteem of some sentimental critics. But she gains, in the end, the love of her husband, and the admiration of her maker.

To multiply instances would be tedious. Shakespeare's men cannot, as a class, compare with his women for practical genius. They can think and imagine, as only Shakespeare's men can, but their imagination often masters and disables them. Self-deception, it would seem, is a male weakness The whole controversy is summarised in the difference between Macbeth and his wife. She knows him well, and has no patience with his scruples and dallyings:

> What thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win.

For her, all the details and consequences of the crime are accepted with the crime itself. Her mind refuses to go behind the first crucial decision, or to waste precious time by speculating on the strangeness of things. But he, though he bends up each corporal agent to the terrible feat, cannot thus control the activities of his mind, or subdue them to a single practical end. His imagination will not be denied its ghastly play; he sees the murder as a single incident in the moving history of human woe, or forgets the need of the moment in the intellectual interest of his own sensations. When he acts, he acts in a frenzy which procures him oblivion.

Because they do not ask questions of life, and do not doubt or deliberate concerning the fundamental grounds for action, Shakespeare's women are, in the main, either good or bad. The middle region of character, where mixed motives predominate, belongs chiefly to the men. The women act not on thought, but on instinct, which, once it is accepted, admits of no argument. The subtlety and breadth of Shakespeare's knowledge of feminine instinct cannot be overpraised. Celia, in *As You Like It*, is lightly sketched, yet how demure and tender she is, and how worldly-wise. When her cousin complains of the briars that fill this working-day world, she is ready with a feminine moral: "If we walk not in the trodden paths, our very petticoats will catch them." Rosalind's easy grace and voluble wit do not hide from sight those more delicate touches of nature, as when she half turns back to the victorious Orlando—"Did you call, Sir?"—or breaks down, in the forest, at the sight of the blood-stained handkerchief, and utters the cry of a child: "I would I were at home." It is by small indications of this kind that Shake-

speare convinces us of his knowledge. He has no general theory; his women are often witty and daring, but they are never made all of wit and courage. Even Lady Macbeth's courage fails her when the affections of her childhood strike across her memory:

> Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done't.

Though she is magnificently rational and self-controlled at the crisis of the action, the recoil of the senses, which she had mastered in her waking moments, comes over her again in sleep: "Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." So unerring is Shakespeare's intuition that he can supplement even Plutarch's narrative with wonderful additions of his own devising. There is nothing in the speech of Volumnia, the Roman matron, more convincing and lifelike than the remonstrance which Shakespeare interpolates:

> Thou hast never in thy life
> Show'd thy dear mother any courtesy;
> When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,
> Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home
> Loaden with honour.

There is nothing in the behaviour of Cleopatra, the eternal courtesan, more characteristic than the deliberate frowardness of mood which Shakespeare, in direct opposition to Plutarch's account, invents for her:

> If you find him sad,
> Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
> That I am sudden sick.

When Charmian remarks that to gain and keep

Antony's love it were better to cross him in nothing, Cleopatra impatiently retorts:

> Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him.

Yet neither is Cleopatra a type; she is her own unparalleled self. Some distant relatives she has among the other plays. The lesson that she teaches to Charmian is a lesson which Cressida and Doll Tearsheet also know by instinct:

> O foolish Cressid: I might have still held off,
> And then you would have tarried.

But Cressida is weaker, lighter, more wavering, than the tragic Queen who, when she hears that Antony has married Octavia, is wounded to the quick, and cries out:

> Pity me, Charmian;
> But do not speak to me.

And Doll Tearsheet, with only a small measure of the same craft, has the wealth of homely affection and plebeian good-fellowship which belongs to a lowlier world: "Come, I'll be friends with thee, Jack; thou art going to the wars, and whether I shall ever see thee again or no, there is nobody cares." Shakespeare, like Nature, is careful of the type; but, unlike Nature, he cares even more for the life of the individual.

With Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia, his art is yet more wonderful, for it works in fewer words. None of these characters is theorised; none belongs to a type. Each is, in a sense, born of the situation, and inspired by it. The deserted maiden, the loyal wife, the daughter who becomes her father's protector—none of them has a thought or a feeling that forgets the situation and her own part in it, so that all of them win the love of the reader by their very simplicity and

intensity. If Shakespeare had been called on to draw generic portraits of these three types, he would have despised the attempt. On his theatre, as in life, character is made by opportunity, and welded to endurance by the blows of Fate. The most beautiful characters of his creation depend for their beauty on their impulsive response to the need of the moment. "Through the whole of the dialogue appropriated to Desdemona," says Mrs. Jameson, "there is not one general observation. Words are with her the vehicle of sentiment, and never of reflection." It may well be doubted whether Shakespeare was fully conscious of this. He worked from the heart outwards; and his instinct fastened on the right words. An elaborate metaphor on Desdemona's lips would have shocked his sense of fitness, as, now that we know her, it would shock ours. The first greeting that she exchanges with Othello, when he lands at Cyprus, is of a piece with all that she says. "O, my fair warrior," says Othello, whose imagination, as well as his heart, is in her service. For Desdemona the unadorned truth is enough; and she replies: "My dear Othello." Cordelia's most moving speeches are as simple as this. Ophelia is so real that differences of critical opinion concerning her throw light on nothing but the critics. Coleridge thought her the purest and loveliest of Shakespeare's women; some other critics have cried out on her timidity and pettiness. If she could be brought to life, and introduced to her judges, these differences would no doubt persist. Fortunately they are of comparatively little account; when a firm verdict on one of his characters is essential to Shakespeare's dramatic purpose, he does not leave his readers in doubt.

The comparative simplicity of character which Sh-

tinguishes Shakespeare's women from his men is maintained throughout the plays. Cleopatra, unlike Antony, is at one with herself, and entertains no divided counsels. Regan and Goneril do not go motive-hunting, like Iago; they are hard and cruel and utterly self-assured. They have the certainty and ease in action that Hamlet coveted:

> With wings as swift
> As meditation, or the thoughts of love,
> They sweep to their revenge.

A similar confidence inspires the beautiful company of Shakespeare's self-devoted heroines. There is no Hamlet among them, no Jaques, no Biron. Their wit is quick and searching; but it is wholly at the command of their will, and is never employed to disturb or destroy. Love and service are as natural to them as breathing. They are the sunlight of the plays, obscured at times by clouds and storms of melancholy and misdoing, but never subdued or defeated. In the Comedies they are the spirit of happiness; in the Tragedies they are the only warrant and token of ultimate salvation, the last refuge and sanctuary of faith. If Othello had died blaspheming Desdemona, if Lear had refused to be reconciled with Cordelia, there would be good reason to talk of Shakespeare's pessimism. As it is, there is no room for such a discussion; in the wildest and most destructive tempests his sheet-anchors hold.

The Historical plays occupy a middle place in the Folio, and, in the process of Shakespeare's development, are a link between Comedy and Tragedy. Plays founded on English history were already popular when Shakespeare began to write; and while he was still an apprentice, their tragic possibilities had been splendidly

demonstrated in Marlowe's *Edward II.* He very early turned his hand to them, and the exercise that they gave him steadied his imagination, and taught him how to achieve a new solidity and breadth of representation. By degrees he ventured to intermix the treatment of high political affairs with familiar pictures of daily life, so that what might otherwise have seemed stilted and artificial was reduced to ordinary standards, and set against a background of verisimilitude and reality. His Comedy, timidly at first, and at last triumphantly, intruded upon his History; his vision of reality was widened to include in a single perspective courts and taverns, kings and highwaymen, diplomatic conferences, battles, street brawls, and the humours of low life. He gave us the measure of his own magnanimity in the two parts of *Henry IV*, a play of incomparable ease, and variety, and mastery. Thence, having perfected himself in his craft, he passed on to graver themes, and, with Plutarch for his text-book, resuscitated the world-drama of the Romans; or breathed life into those fables of early British history which he found in Holinshed. His studies in English history determined his later dramatic career, and taught him the necromancer's art—

> To outrun hasty time, retrieve the fates,
> Roll back the heavens, blow ope the iron gates
> Of death and Lethe, where confused lie
> Great heaps of ruinous mortality.

He revived dead princes and heroes, and set them in action on a stage crowded with life and manners.

That love of incongruity and diversity which is the soul of a humourist had already manifested itself in his early comedies. The gossamer civilisation of the fairies is judged by Bottom the Weaver, who, in

his turn, along with his rustic companions, must undergo the courtly criticism of Duke Theseus and the Queen of the Amazons. In *Love's Labour 's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *As You Like It*, to name no others, affairs of political import colour, by their neighbourhood, the affections and fortunes of the lovers. But it is in the Historical plays that comedy is first perfectly blended with serious political interest. Shakespeare's instinct for reality, his suspicion of all that will not bear to be brought into contact with the gross elements, made him willing to use comedy and tragedy as a touchstone the one for the other. Nothing that is real in either of them can be damaged by the contact. It is the sham solemnity of grief that is impaired or broken by laughter, and the empty heartless jest that is made to seem inhuman by contrast with the sadness of mortal destiny. The tragic and the comic jostle each other in life: their separation is the work of ceremony, not of nature. A political people like the Greeks, with their passionate belief in the State, will impose their sense of public decorum upon the drama; but the more irresponsible modern temper is not content to forego the keen intellectual pleasure of paradox and contrast. The description of a funeral in Scott's *Journal* is a picture after the modern manner: "There is such a mixture of mummery with real grief—the actual mourner perhaps heart-broken, and all the rest making solemn faces, and whispering observations on the weather and public news, and here and there a greedy fellow enjoying the cake and wine. To me it is a farce full of most tragical mirth." Shakespeare keeps the mirth and the tragedy close together, with no disrespect done to either. He narrates serious events, and portrays great crises in history, to the accompaniment of a comic chorus. He

admits us to the King's secret thoughts, and lets us overhear the grumbling of the carriers in the inn-yard at Rochester. We witness the Earl of Northumberland's passion over the death of his son, and sit in Justice Shallow's garden to talk of pippins and carraways. War is shown in its double aspect, as it appears to the statesman and to the recruiting-sergeant. For a last reach of boldness, the same characters are hurried through many diverse scenes, and the same events are exhibited in their greater and lesser effects. The fortunes of the kingdom call the revellers away from the tavern. The Prince's royalty is not obscured under his serving-man's costume, nor is Sir John Falstaff's wit abated in the midst of death and battle.

In Shakespeare's earlier historical work a certain formality and timidity of imagination make themselves felt. His bad kings, Richard the Third and John, are not wholly unlike the villains of melodrama. King Richard is an explanatory sinner:

> Therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain.

King John, in his murderous instructions to Hubert, expresses a wish for the fitting stage effects, darkness, and the churchyard, and the sound of the passing-bell. All this is far enough removed from the sureness of Shakespeare's later handling of similar themes. From the first he gave dramatic unity to his Histories by building them round the character of the king. To those who lived under the rule of Elizabeth, and whose fathers had been the subjects of Henry VIII., it would have seemed a foolish paradox to maintain that the character of the ruler was a cause of small importance in the making of history.

But these kings of the earlier plays are seen distantly, through a veil of popular superstition; the full irony of the position is not yet realised; as if it were so easy to be a good king that nothing but a double dose of original sin can explain the failure. It was a great advance in method when Shakespeare, in *Richard II.*, brought the king to the ordinary human level, and set himself to conceive the position from within.

Richard II. is among the Histories what *Romeo and Juliet* is among the Tragedies, an almost purely lyrical drama, swift and simple. Richard is possessed by the sentiment of royalty, moved by a poet's delight in its glitter and pomp, and quick to recognise the pathos of its insecurity. There is nothing that we feel in contemplating his tragic fall which is not taught us by himself. Our pity for him, our sense of the cruelty of fate, are but a reflection of his own moving and subtle poetry. Weakness there is in him, but it hardly endears him the less; it is akin to the weakness of Hamlet and of Falstaff, who cannot long concentrate their minds on a narrow practical problem; cannot refuse themselves that sudden appeal to universal considerations which is called philosophy or humour. Like them, Richard juggles with thought and action: he is a creature of impulse, but when his impulse is foiled, he lightly discounts it at once by considering it in relation to the stars and the great scheme of things. What is failure, in a world where all men are mortal? Sometimes the beating of his own heart rouses him to fitful activity:

> Proud Bolingbroke, I come
> To change blows with thee for our day of doom.

Then again he relapses into the fatalistic mood of thought, which he beautifies with humility:

Strives Bolingbroke to be as great as we?
Greater he shall not be: if he serve God,
We'll serve him too, and be his fellow so.

The language of resignation is natural to him; his weakness finds refuge in the same philosophic creed which is uttered defiantly, on the scaffold, by the hero of Chapman's tragedy:

If I rise, to heaven I rise; if fall,
I likewise fall to heaven · what stronger faith
Hath any of your souls?

It is difficult to condemn Richard without taking sides against poetry. He has a delicate and prolific fancy, which flowers into many dream-shapes in the prison; a wide and true imagination, which expresses itself in his great speech on the monarchy of Death; and a deep discernment of tragic issues, which gives thrilling effect to his bitterest outcry:

Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates
Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.

The mirror-scene at the deposition—which, like the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*, seems to have been wholly of Shakespeare's invention—is a wonderful summary and parable of the action of the play. The mirror is broken against the ground, and the armed attendants stand silent, waiting to take Richard to the Tower.

For all the intimacy and sympathy of the portraiture, we are not permitted to lose sight of Richard's essential weakness. The greater part of the Third Act is devoted to showing, with much emphasis and repetition, how helpless and unstable he

is at a crisis. If Richard was Shakespeare, as some critics have held, he was not the whole of Shakespeare. Even while the play was writing, the design for a sequel and contrast was beginning to take shape. The matter of the plays that were to follow is foreshadowed in the Queen's lamenting address to Richard:

> Thou most beauteous inn,
> Why should hard-favour'd Grief be lodg'd in thee,
> When Triumph is become an ale-house guest?

Over against Richard it was Shakespeare's plan to set, not the crafty and reserved Bolingbroke, but his son, King Henry V., the darling of the people, a lusty hero, open of heart and hand, unthrifty and dissolute in his youth, in his riper age the support and glory of the nation. The academy where the hero was to graduate was to be Shakespeare's own school, the life of the tavern and the street.

It was a contrast of brilliant promise, and, if a choice must be made, it is not hard to determine on which side Shakespeare's fuller sympathies lay. The king who was equal to circumstance was the king for him. Yet Henry V., it may be confessed, is not so inwardly conceived as Richard II. His qualities are more popular and commonplace. Shakespeare plainly admires him, and feels towards him none of that resentment which the spectacle of robust energy and easy success produces in weaker tempers. If Henry V., as Prince and King, seems to fall short in some respects of the well-knit perfection that was intended, it is the price that he pays for incautiously admitting to his companionship a greater than himself, who robs him of his virtue, and makes him a satellite in a larger orbit. Less tragic than Richard, less comic than Falstaff, the poor Prince is hampered on both

sides, and confined to the narrower domain of practical success.

From his first entrance Falstaff dominates the play. The Prince tries in vain to be even with him: Falstaff, as Hazlitt has said, is the better man of the two. He speaks no more than the truth when he makes his claim: "I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." All the best wit in the play is engineered and suggested by him; even the *Prince, when he tries to match him, falls under the control of the prime inventor, and makes the obvious* and expected retorts, which give occasion for a yet more brilliant display of that surprising genius. It is the measure of the Prince's inferiority that to him Falstaff seems "rather ludicrous than witty," even while all the wit that passes current is being issued from Falstaff's mint, and stamped with the mark of his sovereignty. The disparity between the two characters extends itself to their kingdoms, the Court and the Tavern. The one is restrained, formal, full of fatigues and necessities and ambitions; the other is free and natural, the home of zest and ease. There are pretences in both, but with what a difference! In the one there is real, hard, selfish hypocrisy and treachery; in the other a world of make-believe and fiction, all invented for delight. It is no wonder that Falstaff attracts to himself the bulk of our sympathies, and perverts the moral issues. One critic, touched to the heart by the casting-off of Falstaff, so far forgets his morality as to take comfort in the reflection that the thousand pounds belonging to *Justice Shallow* is safe in Falstaff's pocket, and will help to provide for his old age.

Yet the Prince, if he loses the first place in our affections, makes a brave fight for it. Shakespeare

s what he can for him. He is valorous, generous, l high-spirited. When Falstaff claims to have slain rcy in single fight, he puts in no word for his own owess:

> For my part, if a lie may do thee grace,
> I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have.

He has some tenderness, and a deeply conceived sense of his great responsibilities. Even his wit would be remarkable in any other company, and his rich vocabulary of fancy and abuse speaks him a ready learner. If his poetry tends to rhetoric, in his instinct for prose and sound sense he almost matches the admirable Rosalind—"To say to thee that I shall die, is true; but for thy love, by the Lord, no; yet I love thee, too." It is all in vain; his good and amiable qualities do not teach him the way to our hearts. The "noble change" which he hath purposed, and of which we hear so much, taints him in the character of a boon-companion. He is double-minded: he keeps back a part of the price. Falstaff gives the whole of himself to enjoyment, so that the strivings and virtues of half-hearted sinners seem tame and poor beside him. He bestrides the play like a Colossus, and the young gallants walk under his huge legs and peep about to find themselves honourable graves. In all stress of circumstance, hunted by misfortune and disgrace, he rises to the occasion, so that the play takes on the colour of the popular beast-fable; our chief concern is that the hero shall never be outwitted; and he never is.

There is more of Shakespeare in this amazing character than in all the poetry of *Richard II.* Falstaff is a comic Hamlet, stronger in practical resource, and hardly less rich in thought. He is in love with life, as Hamlet is out of love with it; he cheats and lies and steals with no hesitation and no afterthought; he

runs away or counterfeits death with more courage than others show in deeds of knightly daring. The accidents and escapades of his life give ever renewed occasion for the triumph of spirit over matter, and show us the real man, above them all, and aloof from them, calm, aristocratic, fanciful, scorning opinion, following his own ends, and intellectual to the finger-tips. He has been well called "a kind of military freethinker." He will fight no longer than he sees reason. His speech on honour might have been spoken by Hamlet—with what a different conclusion! He is never for a moment entangled in the web of his own deceits; his mind is absolutely clear of cant; his self-respect is magnificent and unfailing. The judgments passed on him by others, kings or justices, affect him not at all, while there are few of these others who can escape with credit from the severe ordeal of his disinterested judgment upon them. The character of Master Shallow is an open book to that impartial scrutiny. "It is a wonderful thing," says Falstaff, "to see the semblable coherence of his men's spirits and his: they, by observing of him, do bear themselves like foolish justices; he, by conversing with them, is turn'd into a justice-like serving-man." Yet, for all his clarity of vision, Falstaff is never feared; there is no grain of malevolence in him; wherever he comes he brings with him the pure spirit of delight.

How was a character like this to be disposed of? He had been brought in as an amusement, and had rapidly established himself as the chief person of the play. There seemed to be no reason why he should not go on for ever. He was becoming dangerous. No serious action could be attended to while every one was waiting to see how Falstaff would take it. A clear stage was needed for the patriotic and warlike exploits of

King Harry; here was to be no place for critics and philosophers. Shakespeare disgraces Falstaff, and banishes him from the Court. But this was not enough; it was a part of Falstaff's magnanimity that disgrace had never made the smallest difference to him, and had often been used by him as a stepping-stone to new achievement. Even in banishment he was likely to prove as dangerous as Napoleon in Elba. There was nothing for it; in the name of the public safety, and to protect him from falling into bad hands, Falstaff must be put to death. So he takes his last departure, "an it had been any christom child," and King Harry is set free to pursue the life of heroism.

With the passing of Falstaff Shakespeare's youth was ended. All that wonderful experience of London life, all those days and nights of freedom and adventure and the wooing of new pleasures, seem to be embodied in this great figure, the friend and companion of the young. We can trace his history, from his first boyhood, when he broke Scogan's head at the court gate, to his death in the second childhood of delirium. He was never old. "What, ye knaves," he cries, at the assault on the Gadshill travellers, "young men must live." "You that are old," he reminds the Chief Justice, "consider not the capacities of us that are young." The gods, loving him, decreed that he should die as he was born, with a white head and a round belly, in the prime of his joyful days.

He was brought to life again, by Royal command, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; but his devoted admirers have never been able to accept that [illegible] for a part of his history. The chambering a[illegible]on-ness of amorous intrigue suits ill with his [illegible] le pride of spirit. It is good to hear th[illegible]'s voice again; and his wit has not lost al[illegible].

But he is fallen and changed; he has lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English, and is become the butt of citizens and their romping wives. Worst of all, he is afraid of the fairies. Bottom the weaver never fell so low—"Scratch my head, Peaseblossom." Shakespeare has an ill conscience in this matter, and endeavours to salve it by a long apology. "See now," says Falstaff, "how wit may be made a Jack-a-lent, when 'tis upon ill employment." But such an apology is worse than the offence. It presents [illegible]

opinions. These opinions have, perhaps, been too rashly formulated; yet it cannot be denied that certain definite and strong impressions have been made by the plays on critics of the most diverse leanings. It is safe to say that Shakespeare had a very keen sense of government, its utility and necessity. If he is not a partisan of authority, he is at least a passionate friend to order. His thought is everywhere the thought of a poet, and he views social order as part of a wider harmony. When his imagination seeks a tragic climax, the ultimate disaster and horror commonly presents itself to him as chaos. His survey of human society and of the laws that bind man to man is astronomical in its rapidity and breadth. So it is in the curse uttered by Timon:

> Piety, and fear,
> Religion to the Gods, peace, justice, truth,
> Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
> Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
> Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
> Decline to your confounding contraries,
> And let confusion live.

King Harry; here was to be no place for critics and philosophers. Shakespeare disgraces Falstaff, and banishes him from the Court. But this was not enough; it was a part of Falstaff's magnanimity that disgrace had never made the smallest difference to him, and had often been used by him as a stepping-stone to new achievement. Even in banishment he was likely to prove as dangerous as Napoleon in Elba. There was nothing for it; in the name of the public safety, and to protect him from falling into bad hands, Falstaff must be put to death. So he takes his last departure, "an it had been any christom child," and King Harry is set free to pursue the life of heroism.

With the passing of Falstaff Shakespeare's youth was ended. All that wonderful experience of London life, all those days and nights of freedom and adventure and the wooing of new pleasures, seem to be embodied in this great figure, the friend and companion of the young. We can trace his history, from his first boyhood, when he broke Scogan's head at the court gate, to his death in the second childhood of delirium. He was never old. "What, ye knaves," he cries, at the assault on the Gadshill travellers, "young men must live." "You that are old," he reminds the Chief Justice, "consider not the capacities of us that are young." The gods, loving him, decreed that he should die as he was born, with a white head and a round belly, in the prime of his joyful days.

He was brought to life again, by Royal command, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; but his devoted admirers have never been able to accept that play for a part of his history. The chambering and wantonness of amorous intrigue suits ill with his indomitable pride of spirit. It is good to hear the trick of his voice again; and his wit has not lost all its brightness.

But he is fallen and changed: he has lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English, and is become the butt of citizens and their scheming wives. Worst of all, he is afraid of the fairies. Bottom the weaver never fell so low—"Scratch my head, Peaseblossom." Shakespeare has an ill conscience in this matter, and endeavours to salve it by a long apology. "See now," says Falstaff, "how wit may be made a Jack-a-lent, when 'tis upon ill employment." But such an apology is worse than the offence. It presents Falstaff to us in the guise of a creeping moralist.

The historical plays, English and Roman, have often been used as evidence of their author's political opinions. These opinions have, perhaps, been too rashly formulated; yet it cannot be denied that certain definite and strong impressions have been made by the plays on critics of the most diverse leanings. It is safe to say that Shakespeare had a very keen sense of government, its utility and necessity. If he is not a partisan of authority, he is at least a passionate friend to order. His thought is everywhere the thought of a poet, and he views social order [illegible] community presents itself to him as chaos. His survey of human society and of the laws that bind man to man is astronomical in its rapidity and breadth. So it is in the curse uttered by Timon:

> Piety, and fear,
> Religion to the Gods, peace, justice, truth,
> Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
> Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
> Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
> Decline to your confounding contraries,
> And let confusion live.

So it is also in the great speech of Ulysses, and in half a score of passages in the Tragedies. He extols government with a fervour that suggests a real and ever-present fear of the breaking of the flood-gates; he delights in government, as painters and musicians delight in composition and balance.

As to the merits of differing forms of government, that question was hardly a live one in the reign of Elizabeth, and seems not to have exercised Shakespeare's thought. In *Julius Caesar*, where the subject gave him his chance, he accepts Plutarch for his guide, and does not digress into political theory. It has often been said that he dislikes and distrusts crowds. Certainly the common people, in *Henry VI.*, and *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*, are made ludicrous and foolish. But after all, a love for crowds and a reverence for mob-orators are not so often found among dispassionate thinkers as to make Shakespeare's case strange; and it is always to be remembered that he was a dramatist. His point of view was given him by the little group of his principal characters, and there was no room for the people save as a fluctuating background or a passing street-show. We do not see Cade at home. Where the feelings of universal humanity fall to be expressed, caste and station are of no account; Macduff, a noble, bereaved of his children, speaks for all mankind.

Nevertheless, the impression persists, that here, and here alone, Shakespeare exhibits some partiality. It was natural enough that his political opinions should take their colour from his courtly companions, whose business was politics; nor was his own profession likely to alter his sympathies. Who should know the weaknesses and vanities of the people better than a theatrical manager? There is no great political signi-

ficance in the question; the politics of the plays were never challenged till America began to read human history by the light of her own self-consciousness. It is true that Shakespeare is curiously impatient of dullness, and that he pays scant regard, and does no justice, to men of slow wit. He never emancipated himself completely from the prejudices of verbal education: to be a stranger to all that brilliant craftsmanship and all those subtle dialectical processes which had given him so much pleasure was to forfeit some hold on his sympathy. His clowns and rustics are often the merest mechanisms of comic error and verbose irrelevance. In this respect he is worlds removed from Chaucer, who understands social differences as Shakespeare never did, and to whom, therefore, social differences count for less. How wholly real and human Dogberry or Verges, Polonius or Lady Capulet, would have been in Chaucer's way of handling! The Reeve, in the *Canterbury Tales*, is a man of the people, an old man and a talkative, but his simple philosophy of life has a breadth and seriousness that cannot be matched among Shakespeare's tradesfolk. Yet, even here, some allowance must be made for the necessities of dramatic presentation, and for the time-honoured conventions of romantic method. The eternal truths of human nature are not the less true because they are illustrated in the person of a king.

In the great Tragedies Shakespeare comes at last face to face with the mystery and cruelty of human life. He had never been satisfied with the world of romance, guarded like a dream from all external violence; and his plays, when they are arranged in order, exhibit the gradual progress of the invasion of reality. At first he gently and humorously suggests the

contrast: the most lifelike characters in the earlier plays are often those which are invented and added by himself. Jaques and Touchstone, Mercutio and the Nurse, Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio, represent the encroachments of daily life, in all its variety, on the symmetry of a romantic plot. The bastard Faulconbridge and Falstaff are the spirit of criticism, making itself at home among the formalities of history. But in the great Tragedies the most fully conceived characters are no longer supernumeraries; they are the heart of the play. Hamlet is both protagonist and critic. The passion of Lear and Othello and Macbeth is too real, too intimately known, to gain or lose by contrast: the very citadel of life is shaken and stormed by the onslaught of reality. We are no longer saved by a mere trick, as in *The Merchant of Venice* or *Measure for Measure*; there is no hope of a reprieve; the worst that can befall has happened, and we are stretched on the rack, beyond the mercy of narcotics, our eyes open and our senses preternaturally quickened, to endure till the end.

There was a foreboding of this even in the happiest of the early plays, a gentle undertone of melancholy, which added poignancy to the happiness by reminding us of the insecurity of mortal things. The songs sung by the Clown in *Twelfth Night* are an exquisite example:

> What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
> Present mirth hath present laughter:
> What's to come is still unsure.

Translated into the language of tragedy, these lines tell the story of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The concluding song—

> When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,—

the forlorn pathos of *King Lear*. The rain th every day, the men who shut their gates knaves and thieves, the world that began a while ago, are like disconnected dim memories, ortents, troubling the mind of a child. In the gedies they come out of the twilight, and are hard d real in the broad light of day. We have been ccustomed to escape from these miseries by waking, ut now the last terror confronts us: our dream has e true.

hen Shakespeare grappled with the ultimate lems of life he had the help of no talisman or script. Doctrine, theory, metaphysic, morals,— should these help a man at the last encounter? Men forge themselves these weapons, and glory in them, only to find them an encumbrance at the hour of need. Shakespeare's many allusions to philosophy and reason show how little he trusted them It is the foolish Master Slender and the satirical Benedick who profess that their love is governed by reason.

The will of man is by his reason sway'd,

says Lysander, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, even while he is the helpless plaything of the fairies. Where pain and sorrow come, reason is powerless, good counsel turns to passion, and philosophy is put to shame:

I pray thee, peace! I will be flesh and blood;
For there was never yet Philosopher
That could endure the tooth-ache patiently,
However they have writ the style of Gods,
And made a push at chance and sufferance.

It is therefore vain to seek in the plays for a philosophy or doctrine which may be extracted and set out in brief. Shakespeare's philosophy was the philosophy

of the shepherd Corin: he knew that the more one sickens, the worse at ease he is, that the property of rain is to wet, and of fire to burn. King Lear, when he came by the same knowledge, saw through the flatteries and deceits on which he had been fed—"They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof." All doctrines and theories concerning the place of man in the universe, and the origin of evil, are a poor and partial business compared with that dazzling vision of the pitiful estate of humanity which is revealed by Tragedy.

The vision, as it was seen by Shakespeare, is so solemn, and terrible, and convincing in its reality, that there are few, perhaps, among his readers who have not averted or covered their eyes. "I might relate," says Johnson, "that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor." For the better part of a century the feelings of playgoers were spared by alterations in the acting version. With readers of the play other protective devices have found favour. These events, they have been willing to believe, are a fable designed by Shakespeare to illustrate the possible awful consequences of error and thoughtlessness. Such things never happened; or, if they happened, at least we can be careful, and they never need happen again. So the reader takes refuge in morality, from motives not of pride, but of terror, because morality is within man's reach. The breaking of a bridge from faulty construction excites none of the panic fear that is produced by an earthquake.

But here we have to do with an earthquake, and good conduct is of no avail. Morality is not denied;

it is overwhelmed and tossed aside by the inrush of the sea. There is no moral lesson to be read, except accidentally, in any of Shakespeare's tragedies. They deal with greater things than man; with powers and passions, elemental forces, and dark abysses of suffering; with the central fire, which breaks through the thin crust of civilisation, and makes a splendour in the sky above the blackness of ruined homes. Because he is a poet, and has a true imagination, Shakespeare knows how precarious is man's tenure of the soil, how deceitful are his quiet orderly habits and his prosaic speech. At any moment, by the operation of chance, or fate, these things may be broken up, and the world given over once more to the forces that struggled in chaos.

It is not true to say that in these tragedies character is destiny. Othello is not a jealous man; he is a man carried off his feet, wave-drenched and blinded by the passion of love Macbeth is not a murderous politician; he is a man possessed Lear no doubt has faults; he is irritable and exacting, and the price that he pays for these weaknesses of old age is that they let loose hell. Hamlet is sensitive, thoughtful, generous, impulsive,—"a pure, noble, and most moral nature"—yet he does not escape the extreme penalty, and at the bar of a false criticism he too is made guilty of the catastrophe. But Shakespeare, who watched his heroes, awestruck, as he saw them being drawn into the gulf, passed no such judgment on them. In his view of it, what they suffer is out of all proportion to what they do and are They are presented with a choice, and the essence of the tragedy is that choice is impossible. Coriolanus has to choose between the pride of his country and the closest of human affections Antony stands poised between love and empire

it is overwhelmed and tossed aside by the inrush of the sea. There is no moral lesson to be read, except accidentally, in any of Shakespeare's tragedies. They deal with greater things than man; with powers and passions, elemental forces, and dark abysses of suffering; with the central fire, which breaks through the thin crust of civilisation, and makes a splendour in the sky above the blackness of ruined homes. Because he is a poet, and has a true imagination, Shakespeare knows how precarious is man's tenure of the soil, how deceitful are his quiet orderly habits and his prosaic speech. At any moment, by the operation of chance, or fate, these things may be broken up, and the world given over once more to the forces that struggled in chaos.

It is not true to say that in these tragedies character is destiny. Othello is not a jealous man; he is a man carried off his feet, wave-drenched and blinded by the passion of love Macbeth is not a murderous politician; he is a man possessed. Lear no doubt has faults; he is irritable and exacting, and the price that he pays for these weaknesses of old age is that they let loose hell. Hamlet is sensitive, thoughtful, generous, impulsive,—"a pure, noble, and most moral nature"—yet he does not escape the extreme penalty, and at the bar of a false criticism he too is made guilty of the catastrophe. But Shakespeare, who watched his heroes, awestruck, as he saw them being drawn into the gulf, passed no such judgment on them. In his view of it, what they suffer is out of all proportion to what they do and are. They are presented with a choice, and the essence of the tragedy is that choice is impossible. Coriolanus has to choose between the pride of his country and the closest of human affections. Antony stands poised between love and empire.

Macbeth commits a foul crime; but Shakespeare's tragic stress is laid on the hopelessness of the dilemma that follows, and his great pity for mortality makes the crime a lesser thing. Hamlet fluctuates between the thought which leads nowhither and the action which is narrow and profoundly unsatisfying. Brutus, like Coriolanus, has to choose between his highest political hopes and the private ties of humanity. Lear's misdoing is forgotten in the doom that falls upon him; after his fit of jealous anger he awakes to find that he has no further choice, and is driven into the wilderness, a scapegoat for mankind. Othello—but the story of Othello exemplifies a further reach of Shakespeare's fearful irony—Othello, like Hamlet, suffers for his very virtues, and the noblest qualities of his mind are made the instruments of his crucifixion. A very brief examination of these two plays must serve in place of a fuller commentary.

The character of Hamlet has been many times discussed, and the opinions expressed may, for the most part, be ranged in two opposing camps. Some critics have held, with Goethe and Coleridge, that Hamlet is Shakespeare's study of the unpractical temperament; the portrait of a dreamer. Others, denying this, have called attention to his extraordinary courage and promptitude in action. He follows the Ghost without a moment's misgiving, in spite of his companions' warnings. He kills Polonius out of hand, and, when he finds his mistake, brushes it aside like a fly, to return to the main business. He sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death with cool despatch, and gives them a hasty epitaph:

> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensed points
> Of mighty opposites.

In the sea-fight, we are told, he was the first to board the pirate vessel. And nothing in speech could be more pointed, practical, and searching, than his rapid cross-examination of Horatio concerning the appearance of the Ghost. Some of those who lay stress on these things go further, and maintain that Hamlet succeeds in his designs. His business was to convince himself of the King's guilt, and to make open demonstration of it before all Denmark. When these things are done, he stabs the King, and though his own life is taken by treachery, his task is accomplished, now that the story of the murder cannot be buried in his grave.

Yet when we read this or any other summary of the events narrated, we feel that it takes us far from the real theme of the play. A play is not a collection of the biographies of those who appear in it. It is a grouping of certain facts and events round a single centre, so that they may be seen at a glance. In this play that centre is the mind of Hamlet. We see with his eyes, and think his thoughts. When once we are caught in the rush of events we judge him no more than we judge ourselves. Almost all that has ever been said of his character is true; his character is so live and versatile that it presents many aspects. What is untrue is the common assumption that his character is a chief cause of the dramatic situation, and that Shakespeare intends us to judge it by the event—that the play, in short, is a Moral Play, like one of Miss Edgeworth's stories. A curiously businesslike vein of criticism runs through essays and remarks on Hamlet. There is much talk of failure and success. A ghost has told him to avenge the murder of his father; why does he not do his obvious duty, and do it at once, so that everything may be put in order? His delay, it has sometimes been replied, is justified by his desire to do

his duty in a more effective and workmanlike fashion. The melancholy Prince has certainly not been able to infect all who read his story with his own habit of thought.

If the government of the State of Denmark were one of the issues of the play, there would be a better foothold for those practical moralists. But the State of Denmark is not regarded at all, except as a topical and picturesque setting for the main interest. The tragedy is a tragedy of private life, made conspicuous by the royal station of the chief actors in it. Before the play opens, the deeds which make the tragedy inevitable have already been done. They are revealed to us only as they are revealed to Hamlet. His mother's faithlessness has given him cause for deep unrest and melancholy; he distrusts human nature and longs for death. Then the murder is made known to him. He sees the reality beneath the plausible face of things, and thenceforth the Court of Elsinore becomes for him a theatre where all the powers of the universe are contending:

> O all you host of Heaven! O Earth! What else?
> And shall I couple Hell? O fie: hold, my heart;
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up.

It is no wonder that his friends and companions think him mad; he has seen and known what they cannot see and know, and a barrier has risen between him and them:

> I hold it fit that we shake hands and part;
> You, as your business and desires shall point you;
> For every man has business and desire,
> Such as it is: and for mine own poor part,
> Look you, I'll go pray.

The world has become a mockery under the glare of a single fact. The idea of his mother's perfidy colours all his words and thoughts. The very word "mother" is turned into a name of evil note: "O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother." So also in *Troilus and Cressida*, the springs of humanity are poisoned for Troilus by the falseness of Cressida—"Think, we had mothers." The slower imagination of Ulysses cannot follow the speed of this argument. When he asks, "What hath she done, Prince, that can soil our mothers?" Troilus replies, with all the condensed irony of Hamlet, "Nothing at all, unless that this were she." To Hamlet, in the bitterness of his discovery, the love of Ophelia is a snare; yet there is a tragic touch of gentleness in his parting from her. The waters of destruction are out; she may escape them, if she will. She is innocent as yet, why should she be a breeder of sinners? Let her flee from the wrath to come—"To a nunnery, go!"

It is observed by Coleridge that in Hamlet the equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds is disturbed. Just such a disturbance, so to call it, is produced by any great shock given to feeling, by bereavement or crime breaking in upon the walled serenity of daily life and opening vistas into the infinite expanse, where only the imagination can travel. The horizon is widened far beyond the narrow range of possible action; the old woes of the world are revived, and pass like shadows before the spellbound watcher. What Hamlet does is of little importance; nothing that he can do would avert the tragedy, or lessen his own agony. It is not by what he does that he appeals to us, but by what he sees and feels. Those who see less think him mad. But the King who, in a different manner, has access to what

is passing in Hamlet's mind, knows that he is dangerously sane.

The case of Hamlet well illustrates that old-fashioned psychology which divided the mind of man into active and intellectual powers. Every one who has ever felt the stress of sudden danger must be familiar with the refusal of the intellect to subordinate itself wholly to the will. Even a drowning man, if report be true, often finds his mind at leisure, as though he were contemplating his own struggles from a distance. Action and contemplation are usually separated in the drama, for the sake of clearness, and are embodied in different persons. But they are not separated in life, nor in the character of Hamlet. His actions surprise himself. His reason, being Shakespeare's reason, is superb in its outlook, and sits unmoved above the strife. Thus, while all that he says is characteristic of him, some of it is whimsical, impulsive, individual, a part of the action of the play, while others of his sayings seem to express the mind that he shares with his creator, and to anticipate the reflections of an onlooker.

It is not from the weakness of indecision that Hamlet so often pays tribute to the forces which lie beyond a man's control. Of what he does rashly he says:

> And praised be rashness for it, let us know
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
> When our dear plots do pall; and that should teach us,
> There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

When Horatio tries to dissuade him from the fencing-match, he replies: "Not a whit; we defy augury; there's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow."

In these comments he speaks the mind of the dramatist. A profound sense of fate underlies all Shakespeare's tragedies. Sometimes he permits his characters, Romeo or Hamlet, to give utterance to it; sometimes he prefers a subtler and more ironical method of exposition. Iago and Edmund, alone among the persons of the great tragedies, believe in the sufficiency of man to control his destinies. "Virtue! a fig!" says Iago; "'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus." It is "the excellent foppery of the world," says Edmund, that "we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars." The event is Shakespeare's only reply to these two calculators. His criticism is contained in the event, which often gives a thrill of new meaning to the speeches of the unconscious agents. This classical irony, as it is called, which plays with the ignorance of man, and makes him a prophet in spite of himself, is an essential part of Shakespeare's tragic method. The voice of the prophecy is heard in Romeo's speech to the Friar:

> Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
> Then love-devouring death do what he dare;
> It is enough I may but call her mine.

It is heard again in the last words ever spoken by Juliet to her lover:

> [illegible]

It runs all through *Othello*, so that only a repeated reading of the play can bring out its full meaning. The joyful greetings of Othello and Desdemona in Cyprus are ominous in every line. "If it were now to die," says Othello, "'twere now to be most happy." His words are truer than he knows.

Without this sense of fate, this appreciation of the tides that bear man with them, whether he swim this way or that, tragedy would be impossible. *Othello* is in many ways Shakespeare's supreme achievement—in this among others, that he gives tragic dignity to a squalid story of crime by heightening the characters and making all the events inevitable. The moralists have been eager to lay the blame of these events on Othello, or Desdemona, or both; but the whole meaning of the play would vanish if they were successful. Shakespeare is too strong for them; they cannot make headway against his command of our sympathies. In Othello he portrays a man of a high and passionate nature, ready in action, generous in thought. Othello has lived all his life by faith, not by sight. He cannot observe and interpret trifles; his way has been to brush them aside and ignore them. He is impatient of all that is subtle and devious, as if it were a dishonour. Jealousy and suspicion, as Desdemona knows, are foreign to his nature; he credits others freely with all his own noblest qualities. He hates even the show of concealment; when Iago urges him to retire, to escape the search-party of Brabantio, he replies:

> Not I: I must be found.
> My parts, my title, and my perfect soul
> Shall manifest me rightly.

If he were less credulous, more cautious and alert and observant, he would be a lesser man than he is, and less worthy of our love.

His unquestioning faith in Desdemona is his life—what if his faith fail him? The temptation attacks him on his blind side. He knows nothing of those dark corners of the mind where the meaner passions

germinate. The man who comes to him is one whom he has always accepted for the soul of honesty and good comradeship, a trusted friend and familiar, reluctant to speak, quite disinterested, free from passion, *highly experienced in human life, all honour and* devotion and delicacy,—for so Iago appeared. The game of the adversary was won when Othello first listened. He should have struck Iago, it may be said, at the bare hint, as he smote the turban'd Turk in Aleppo. Iago was well aware of this danger, and bent all the powers of his mind to the crisis. He gives his victim no chance for indignation. Any one who would take the measure of Shakespeare's almost superhuman skill when he rises to meet a difficulty should read the Third Act of *Othello*. The quickest imagination ever given to man is there on its mettle, and racing. There is a horrible kind of reason on Othello's side when he permits Iago to speak. He knew Iago, or so he believed; Desdemona was a fascinating stranger. Her unlikeness to himself was a part of her attraction; his only tie to her was the tie of instinct and faith.

> Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
> When hot for certainties in this our life!

Once he begins to struggle with thought, he is in the labyrinth of the monster, and the day is lost.

If Othello is simple as a hero, Desdemona is simple as a saint. From first to last, while she is unconsciously knotting the cords around her, there is no trace, in any speech of hers, of caution or self-regard. She is utterly trustful, she gives herself away, as the saying is, a hundred times. She is insistent, like a child, but she never defends herself, and never argues. To the end, she simply cannot believe that things are beyond recovery by the power of love:

after the worst scene of all she still trusts the world, and sleeps. Those misguided and unhappy formalists who put her in the witness-box of a police-court, and accuse her of untruth, should be forbidden to read Shakespeare. She was heavenly true. Her answer concerning the handkerchief—"It is not lost: but what and if it were?"—is a pathetic and childlike attempt to maintain the truth of her relation to her husband. How can she know that she is at the bar before a hostile judge, and that her answer will be used against her? If she knew, she would refuse to plead. Othello's question is false in all its implications, which appear vaguely and terribly in his distraught manner. The mischief is already done: in her distress and bewilderment she clutches at words which express one truth at least, the truth that she has done him no wrong. Sir Walter Scott, it may be remembered, with infinitely less at stake, used almost Desdemona's form of words in reply to the question whether he was the author of the Waverley Novels.

If Desdemona had accepted the inhumanity of the position, and, on general grounds of principle, had replied by a statement of the bare fact, she might be a better lawyer in her own cause, but she would forfeit her angel's estate. So also, at those many points in the play where a cool recognition of her danger and a determination to be explicit might have saved her, we cannot wish that she should so save herself. She is tactless, it is said, in her solicitations on behalf of Cassio; but it is the tactlessness of unfaltering faith. When anger and suspicion intrude upon her paradise she cannot deal with them reasonably, as those can who expect them. She is a child to chiding, as she says to Emilia; and a child that shows tact and calmness in managing its elders is not loved the better for it.

The simplicity and purity of these two characters gives to Iago the material of his craft. The sovereign skill of that craft, and his artist's delight in it, have procured him worship, so that he has been enthroned as a kind of evil God. But if no such man ever existed, yet the elements of which he is composed are easy to find in ordinary life. All the cold passions of humanity are compacted in his heart. His main motives are motives of every day—pride in self, contempt for others, delight in irresponsible power. In any human society it may be noted how innocence and freedom win favour by their very ease, and it may be noted also how they arouse a certain sense of hostility in more difficult and grudging spirits. Iago is not an empty dream. But if goodness is sometimes stupid, so is wickedness. Iago can calculate, but he takes no account of the self-forgetful passions. He is surprised by Othello's great burst of pity, when Desdemona kneels at his feet and implores his help to regain her husband's affection, his words seem to betoken some embarrassment, and he makes haste to end the interview. He does not understand any one with whom he has to deal; not Othello, nor Desdemona, nor Cassio, nor his own wife Emilia, and this last misunderstanding involves him in the ruin of his plot.

Shakespeare flinches at nothing: he makes Desdemona kneel to Iago, and sends her to her death without the enlightenment that comes at last to Othello when he discovers his hideous error. She could bear more than Othello, for her love had not wavered. There is a strange sense of triumph even in this appalling close. Shakespeare's treatment of the mystery does not much vary from tragedy to tragedy. In *Othello* the chances were all against the extreme issue; at a dozen points in the story a slip

after the worst scene of all she still trusts the wo and sleeps. Those misguided and unhappy forma who put her in the witness-box of a police-court, accuse her of untruth, should be forbidden to r Shakespeare. She was heavenly true. Her ans concerning the handkerchief—"It is not lost: what and if it were?"—is a pathetic and child attempt to maintain the truth of her relation to husband. How can she know that she is at the before a hostile judge, and that her answer will be u against her? If she knew, she would refuse to pl Othello's question is false in all its implications, w appear vaguely and terribly in his distraught man The mischief is already done: in her distress and wilderment she clutches at words which express truth at least, the truth that she has done him wrong. Sir Walter Scott, it may be remembered, v infinitely less at stake, used almost Desdemona's f of words in reply to the question whether he was author of the Waverley Novels.

If Desdemona had accepted the inhumanity of position, and, on general grounds of principle, replied by a statement of the bare fact, she migh a better lawyer in her own cause, but she would fo her angel's estate. So also, at those many point the play where a cool recognition of her danger ar determination to be explicit might have saved we cannot wish that she should so save herself. is tactless, it is said, in her solicitations on behal Cassio; but it is the tactlessness of unfaltering fa When anger and suspicion intrude upon her para she cannot deal with them reasonably, as those can expect them. She is a child to chiding, as she to Emilia; and a child that shows tact and calm in managing its elders is not loved the better for it

The simplicity and purity of these two characters gives to Iago the material of his craft. The sovereign skill of that craft, and his artist's delight in it, have procured him worship, so that he has been enthroned as a kind of evil God. But if no such man ever existed, yet the elements of which he is composed are easy to find in ordinary life. All the cold passions of humanity are compacted in his heart. His main motives are motives of every day—pride in self, contempt for others, delight in irresponsible power. In any human society it may be noted how innocence and freedom win favour by their very ease, and it may be noted also how they arouse a certain sense of hostility in more difficult and grudging spirits. Iago is not an empty dream. But if goodness is sometimes stupid, so is wickedness. Iago can calculate, but he takes no account of the self-forgetful passions. He is surprised by Othello's great burst of pity; when Desdemona kneels at his feet and implores his help to regain her husband's affection, his words seem to betoken some embarrassment, and he makes haste to end the interview. He does not understand any one with whom he has to deal; not Othello, nor Desdemona, nor Cassio, nor his own wife Emilia, and this last misunderstanding involves him in the ruin of his plot.

Shakespeare flinches at nothing: he makes Desdemona kneel to Iago, and sends her to her death without the enlightenment that comes at last to Othello when he discovers his hideous error. She could bear more than Othello, for her love had not wavered. There is a strange sense of triumph even in this appalling close. Shakespeare's treatment of the mystery does not much vary from tragedy to tragedy. In *Othello* the chances were all against the extreme issue; at a dozen points in the story a slip

or an accident would have brought Iago's fabric about his ears. Yet out of these materials, Shakespeare seems to say, this result may be wrought; and the Heavens will permit it. He points to no conclusion, unless it be this, that the greatest and loveliest virtues, surpassing the common measure, are not to be had for nothing. They must suffer for their greatness. In life they suffer silently, without fame. In Shakespeare's art they are made known to us, and wear their crown. Desdemona and Othello are both made perfect in the act of death, so that the idea of murder is lost and forgotten in the sense of sacrifice.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST PHASE

In the plays of Shakespeare's closing years there is a pervading sense of quiet and happiness which seems to bear witness to a change in the mind of their author. In these latest plays—*Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*—the subjects chosen are tragic in their nature, but they are shaped to a fortunate result. Imogen and Hermione are deeply wronged, like Desdemona; Prospero, like Lear, is driven from his inheritance; yet the forces of destruction do not prevail, and the end brings forgiveness and reunion. There is no reversion to the manner of the Comedies; this new-found happiness is a happiness wrung from experience, and, unlike the old high-spirited gaiety, it does not exult over the evil-doer. An all-embracing tolerance and kindliness inspires these last plays. The amiable rascal, for whom there was no place in the Tragedies, reappears. The outlook on life is widened; and the children—Perdita and Florizel, Miranda and Ferdinand, Guiderius and Arviragus—are permitted to make amends for the faults and misfortunes of their parents. There is still tragic material in plenty, and there are some high-wrought tragic scenes; but the tension is soon relaxed; in two of the plays the construction is loose and rambling; in all three there is a free rein given to humour and fantasy. It is as if Shakespeare were weary of the

business of the drama, and cared only to indulge his whim. He was at the top of his profession, and was no longer forced to adapt himself to the narrower conventions of the stage. He might write what he liked, and he made full use of his hard-earned liberty.

The sense of relief which comes with these last plays, after the prolonged and heightened anguish of the Tragedies, seems to suggest the state of convalescence, when the mind wanders among happy memories, and is restored to a delight in the simplest pleasures. The scene is shifted, for escape from the old jealousies of the Court, to an enchanted island, or to the mountains of Wales, or to the sheep-walks of Bohemia, where the life of the inhabitants is a peaceful round of daily duties and rural pieties. The very structure of the plays has the inconsequence of reverie: even *The Tempest*, while it observes the mechanica unities, escapes from their tyranny by an appeal t supernatural agencies, which in a single day can d the work of years. All these characteristics of matte and form point to the same conclusion, that the dar ness and burden of tragic suffering gave place, in th latest works that Shakespeare wrote for the stage, daylight and ease.

The Tragedies must be reckoned his great achievement, so that it may sound paradoxical speak of the sudden change from Tragedy to Roma as if it betokened a recovery from disease. Ye man can explore the possibilities of suffering Shakespeare did, to the dark end, without peril t own soul. The instinct of self-preservation most men from adventuring near to the edge o abyss. The inevitable pains of life they will themselves to endure, but they are careful n multiply them by imagination, lest their st

should fail. For many years Shakespeare took upon himself the burden of the human race, and struggled in thought under the oppression of sorrows not his own. That he turned at last to happier scenes, and wrote the Romances, is evidence, it may be said, that his grip on the hard facts of life was loosened by fatigue, and that he sought refreshment in irresponsible play. And this perhaps is true; but the marvel is that he ever won his way back into a world where play is possible. He was not unscathed by the ordeal: the smell of the fire had passed on him. There are many fearful passages in the Tragedies, where the reader holds his breath, from sympathy with Shakespeare's characters and apprehension of the madness that threatens them. But there is a far worse terror when it begins to appear that Shakespeare himself is not aloof and secure; that his foothold is precarious on the edge that overlooks the gulf. In *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet* there is an unmistakable note of disgust and disaffection towards the [illegible]

[illegible] disaffection is supplied in each case; Lear's daughters [illegible] occasion, to condemn, or to question, all the business and desire of the race of man. The voice that we have learned to recognise as Shakespeare's is heard, in its most moving accents, blaspheming the very foundations of life and sanity. Those who cannot find in the Sonnets any trace of personal feeling may quite well maintain that here too the passion is simulated; but

the great majority of readers, who, holding no theories, are yet vaguely aware of Shakespeare's presence and control, will recognise what is meant by this worst touch of fear. Some, recognising it, have conceived of Shakespeare as a man whose mind was unbalanced by an excess of emotional sensibility. The excess may be allowed; it is the best part of his wealth; but it must not be taken to imply defect and poverty elsewhere. We do not and cannot know enough of his life even to guess at the experiences which may have left their mark on the darkest of his writings. We do know that only a man of extraordinary strength and serenity of temper could have emerged from these experiences unspoilt. Many a life has been wrecked on a tenth part of the accumulated suffering which finds a voice in the Tragedies. The Romances are our warrant that Shakespeare regained a perfect calm of mind. If *Timon of Athens* had been his last play, who could feel any assurance that he died at peace with the world?

The retirement to Stratford cut him off from the society of writers of books; and, incidentally, cut us off from our last and best opportunity of overhearing his talk. If he had continued in London, and had gathered a school of younger men around him, we should have heard something of him from his disciples. He preferred the more homely circle of Stratford; and he founded no school. Doubtless, when he was giving up business, he made over some of his unfinished work to younger men, with liberty to piece it out. It has been confidently asserted that he collaborated with John Fletcher both in *Henry VIII.*, which appears in the Folio, and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which was published as Fletcher's work. For this partnership of Shakespeare's the evidence, though it consists wholly of a comparison of styles, is stronger than

for any other; and Fletcher was as apt a pupil as could have been found for so impossible a master. But the master must have known that he had nothing to teach which could be effectively learned. Schools are founded by believers in method; he trusted solely to the grace of imagination, and indulged himself, year by year, in wilder and more daring experiments. His work, when it is not inspired, is not even remarkable. Artists of his kind, if they are so unfortunate as to find a following, attract only superstitious and weak-kneed aspirants, who cannot understand that every real thing is liker to every other real thing than to the closest and most reverent imitation of itself. Shakespeare baffled all imitators by his speed and inexhaustible variety. His early comedies might perhaps be brought within the compass of a formula, though the volatile essence which is their soul would escape in the process. His historical plays observe no certain laws, either of history or of the drama. The attempt to find a theoretic basis for the great tragedies has never been attended with the smallest success; man is greater than that mode of his thought which is called philosophy, as the whole is greater than a part; and the Shakespearean drama is an instrument of expression incomparably fuller and richer than the tongs and the bones of moralists and metaphysicians. In his last plays, so far from relaxing the energy of his invention, he outwent himself in fertility and reach. These are the plays which are described in Johnson's eulogy:

> Each change of many-coloured life he drew,
> Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new;
> Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
> And panting Time toiled after him in vain.

The brave new world of his latest invention is rich in picture and memory—shipwreck, battle, the simple funeral of Fidele, the strange adventures of Autolycus, the dances of shepherdesses on the rustic lawn, and of fairies on the yellow sands—but the boldest stroke of his mature power is seen in his creation of a new mythology. In place of the witches and good people of the popular belief, who had already played a part in his drama, he creates spirits of the earth and of the air, the freckled hag-born whelp Caliban, the beautiful and petulant Ariel, both of them subdued to the purposes of man, who is thus made master of his fate and of the world. The brain that devised *The Tempest* was not unstrung by fatigue.

The style of these last plays is a further development of the style of the Tragedies. The thought is often more packed and hurried, the expression more various and fluent, at the expense of full logical ordering. The change which came over Shakespeare's later work is that which Dryden, at an advanced age, perceived in himself. "What judgment I had," he says, in the Preface to the *Fables*, "increases rather than diminishes; and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose." The bombasted magniloquence of the early rhetorical style has now disappeared. The very syntax is the syntax of thought rather than of language; constructions are mixed, grammatical links are dropped, the meaning of many sentences is compressed into one, hints and impressions count for as much as full-blown propositions. An illustration of this late style may be taken from the scene in *The Tempest*, where Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan, tries to persuade

Sebastian to murder his brother Alonso, and to seize upon the kingdom of Naples. Ferdinand, the heir to the kingdom, is believed to have perished in the shipwreck, and Antonio points to the sleeping king:

> *Ant.* Who's the next heir of Naples?
> *Seb.* Claribel.
> *Ant.* She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells
> Ten leagues beyond man's life; she that from Naples
> Can have no note, unless the Sun were post,
> (The man i' th' moon 's too slow) till new-born chins
> Be rough and razorable; she that from whom
> We all were sea-swallow'd, though some cast again,
> And by that destiny to perform an act
> Whereof what's past is prologue; what to come
> In yours and my discharge.

Here is a very huddle of thoughts, tumbled out as they present themselves, eagerly and fast. This crowded utterance is not proper to any one character; Leontes in his jealous speculations, Imogen in her questions addressed to Pisanio, Prospero in his narrative to Miranda, all speak in the same fashion, prompted by the same scurry of thought. It would be right to conclude, from the mere reading, that there was no blot in the papers to which these speeches were committed.

This later style of Shakespeare, as it is seen in the Tragedies and Romances, is perhaps the most wonderful thing in English literature. From the first he was a lover of language, bandying words like tennis-balls, adorning his theme "with many holiday and lady terms," proving that a sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit, so quickly the wrong side may be turned outward. He had a mint of phrases in his brain, an exchequer of words; he had fed of the dainties that are bred in a book; his speech was a very fantastical

banquet. This early practice gave him an assured mastery, so that when his thoughts multiplied and strengthened, he was able to express himself. There has never been a writer who came nearer to giving adequate verbal expression to the subtlest turns of consciousness, the *flitting* shadows and half-conceived ideas and purposes which count for so much in the life of the mind—which determine action, indeed, although they could not be rationally formulated by a lawyer as a plea for action. His language, it is true, is often at its simplest when the thought is most active. So in Macbeth's question:

> But wherefore could not I pronounce Amen?
> I had most need of blessing, and Amen
> Stuck in my throat.

So in Othello's reply to Desdemona's plea for respite—"Being done, there is no pause"—a reply which, better than a long discourse, explains that the crisis in Othello's mind is over, and the deed itself is a mere consequence of that agony. But where the situation allows of it, Shakespeare's wealth of expression is bewildering in its flow and variety. Ideas, metaphors, analogies, illustrations, crowd into his mind, and the pen cannot drive fast enough to give them full expression. He tumbles his jewels out in a heap, and does not spend labour on giving to any of them an elaborate setting. "*His mind and hand went together,*" but his mind went the faster.

His was the age before the Academies, when the processes of popular and literary education had not yet multiplied definitions and hardened usages. There is truth in the common saying that the English language was still fluid in the time of Queen Elizabeth. No man, even if he had the mind to do it, would now

dare to write like Shakespeare. The body of precedent has been enormously increased; science and controversy have been busy, year after year, limiting and distinguishing the meanings of words, for the sake of exactness and uniformity. Hence, although even the most original of writers cannot very seriously modify the language that he uses, Shakespeare enjoyed a freedom of invention unknown to his successors. He coins words lavishly, and assigns new meanings to old forms. He knows nothing of the so-called parts of speech; where he lacks a verb he will make it from the first noun or adjective that comes to hand. The more or less precise significations which are now attached to certain Latin prefixes and suffixes are all disordered and mixed in his use of them. He violates almost every grammatical rule, and, in accordance with what is, after all, the best English usage, neglects formal concord in the interests of a vaguer truth of impression. The number and person of a verb, in his English, are regulated by the meaning of the subject, not by its grammatical form. His language is often too far-fetched, and owes too much to books, to be called colloquial; but the syntax and framework of his sentences have all the freedom of the most impulsive speech.

A few examples, the first that present themselves, may serve to illustrate these general remarks. A sufficient treatise on Shakespeare's English is still to seek, and [illegible] has done more than [illegible] the need, is not yet [illegible] the first recorded occurrence of a word or meaning often belongs to Shakespeare, it is impossible, in any given case, to prove that he was the first inventor. But the cumulative evidence for his inventive habit is irre-

sistible. He calls a nun a "cloystress," and a party of seekers "questrists" or "questants." Terminations are fitted as they come; "ruby," "rubied," and "rubious" are all used adjectivally; "irregular" is varied by "irregulous," "temporal" by "temporary," "distinction" by "distinguishment," and "conspirator" by "conspirer." "Stricture," "prompture," and "expressure" are used severally to mean what would now be conveyed by "strictness," "prompting," and "expression." He strikes out, at a sudden need, words like "opposeless" and "vastidity," "uprighteously" and "inaidible." He coins diminutives as he needs them, "smilets" and "crownets." He borrows words from the French, like "esperance" and "oeillade" (boldly Anglicised as "eliad"), and from the German, as where he speaks of Ophelia's virgin "crants." Perhaps this last word was unintelligible to the audience; it occurs in the Quarto, but is altered in the Folio to "rites." There are no earlier recorded occurrences of "allottery" (in the sense of "portion"), "forgetive," "confixed," "eventful," and very many other words. The meaning that he assigns to words seems often to be a meaning of his own devising. "Unquestionable" he uses in the sense of averse to conversation. In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo, affianced to Mariana, is spoken of as "her combinate husband." The Duke, when he excuses his failure to appear against Angelo, says that he is "combinèd by a sacred vow," and so must needs be absent. Sometimes Shakespeare misuses a word from mistaking its etymology: he uses "fedary" or "federary" in the sense of confederate, not of vassal. He obtains a wonderful expressiveness even from his wildest licence. A good many instances might be gathered from his work to illustrate his curiously impressionist use of

language; he tested a word, it seems, by the ear, and, if it sounded right, accepted it without further scrutiny. Iago, in his advice to Roderigo, speaking of Desdemona's affection to the Moor, says: "It was a violent commencement in her, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration; put but money in thy purse." What does he mean by "sequestration"? No doubt the main part of his meaning is the natural and right meaning of separation, divorce. But the sentence is antithetically constructed, and "sequestration" serves well enough, from its accidental suggestion of "sequence" and "sequel," to set over against "commencement." This is not a scholar's use of language; but it has a magic of its own.

A like brilliant effect is often obtained by the coinage of verbs. What could be more admirable than Cleopatra's description of Octavia?

> Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes,
> And still conclusion, shall acquire no honour
> Demuring upon me

Or, for a last instance of the triumph of wilfulness, it will suffice to take any of the familiar nouns which are used as verbs by Shakespeare. He twice uses "woman" as a verb, but not twice in the same sense. Cassio, in *Othello*, orders Bianca to leave him:

> I do attend here on the General,
> And think it no addition, nor my wish,
> To have him see me woman'd.

The Countess, in *All's Well*, says:

> I have felt so many quirks of joy and grief,
> That the first face of neither, on the start,
> Can woman me unto't.

The word "child" is used with the same freedom; Lear is sympathetically described by Edgar—"he childed as I father'd"; the autumn is "the childing autumn"; Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* tells how his son,

With his varying childness cures in me
Thoughts that would thick my blood.

The build of Shakespeare's earlier verse, with its easy flow of rhythm and observance of the pause at the end of the line, favoured clear syntax. Yet there are instances in the earlier plays of that confused and condensed manner which obscures a simple thought by overlaying it with the metaphors that it happens to suggest. This acceptance of all that passes through the mind became more and more characteristic of Shakespeare's style: he avoids it, at his best, not by careful revision, and rejection on a second reading, but by heating his imagination till it refuses what cannot be perfectly assimilated on the instant. Where he is deliberate and languid, he is often obscure. This is how the King, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, expresses the not very complex idea that decisions are often forced upon us by the lapse of time:

The extreme parts of time extremely forms
All causes to the purpose of his speed,
And often at his very loose decides
That which long process could not arbitrate.

Gratiano, in *The Merchant of Venice*, is entangled in his effort to say that silence is often mistaken for wisdom:

O my Antonio, I do know of these
That therefore only are reputed wise,
For saying nothing; when, I am very sure,
If they should speak, would almost damn those ears,
Which hearing them would call their brothers fools.

Even worshippers of Shakespeare will agree that this is no way to write English. In the later plays elliptical syntax becomes commoner, though the meaning is usually tighter packed. When Polixenes, in *The Winter's Tale*, is pressed by Leontes to prolong his visit, he excuses himself in this fashion:

> I am question'd by my fears, of what may chance,
> Or breed upon our absence, that may blow
> No sneaping winds at home, to make us say,
> This is put forth too truly.

No grammatical analysis of this sentence is possible, yet its meaning is hardly doubtful. The fears of the first line are made to imply hopes in the second, and, in the fourth, are alluded to in the singular number as a feeling of apprehension. Passages like this are legion, and are, for the most part, easily understood at a first glance. He who runs may read, when he who stands and ponders is strangled by the grammatical intricacies. In their slow-witted efforts to regularise the text of Shakespeare, the grammarians have steadily corrupted it, even while they have heaped scorn on the heads of the first editors for presenting them with what Shakespeare wrote.

If there is one mark which more than another distinguishes Shakespeare's mature style from all other writing whatsoever, it is his royal wealth of metaphor. He always loved the high figurative fashion, and in his early writing he was sometimes patient with a figure, elaborating it with care, to make it go upon all fours. So Thurio, in *The Two Gentlemen*, explains to Proteus, by a simile taken from the spinning of flax, how Silvia's love may be transferred from Valentine to himself:

> Therefore, as you unwind her love from him,
> Lest it should ravel, and be good to none,

The word "child" is used with the same freedom; Lear is sympathetically described by Edgar—"he childed as I father'd"; the autumn is "the childing autumn"; Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* tells how his son,

> With his varying childness cures in me
> Thoughts that would thick my blood.

The build of Shakespeare's earlier verse, with its easy flow of rhythm and observance of the pause at the end of the line, favoured clear syntax. Yet there are instances in the earlier plays of that confused and condensed manner which obscures a simple thought by overlaying it with the metaphors that it happens to suggest. This acceptance of all that passes through the mind became more and more characteristic of Shakespeare's style: he avoids it, at his best, not by careful revision, and rejection on a second reading, but by heating his imagination till it refuses what cannot be perfectly assimilated on the instant. Where he is deliberate and languid, he is often obscure. This is how the King, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, expresses the not very complex idea that decisions are often forced upon us by the lapse of time:

> The extreme parts of time extremely forms
> All causes to the purpose of his speed,
> And often at his very loose decides
> That which long process could not arbitrate.

Gratiano, in *The Merchant of Venice*, is entangled in his effort to say that silence is often mistaken for wisdom:

> O my Antonio, I do know of these
> That therefore only are reputed wise,
> For saying nothing; when, I am very sure,
> If they should speak, would almost damn those ears,
> Which hearing them would call their brothers fools.

Even worshippers of Shakespeare will agree that this is no way to write English. In the later plays elliptical syntax becomes commoner, though the meaning is usually tighter packed. When Polixenes, in *The Winter's Tale*, is pressed by Leontes to prolong his visit, he excuses himself in this fashion:

> I am question'd by my fears, of what may chance,
> Or breed upon our absence, that may blow
> No sneaping winds at home, to make us say,
> This is put forth too truly.

No grammatical analysis of this sentence is possible, yet its meaning is hardly doubtful. The fears of the first line are made to imply hopes in the second, and, in the fourth, are alluded to in the singular number as a feeling of apprehension. Passages like this are legion, and are, for the most part, easily understood at a first glance. He who runs may read, when he who stands and ponders is strangled by the grammatical intricacies. In their slow-witted efforts to regularise the text of Shakespeare, the grammarians have steadily corrupted it, even while they have heaped scorn on the heads of the first editors for presenting them with what Shakespeare wrote.

If there is one mark which more than another distinguishes Shakespeare's mature style from all other writing whatsoever, it is his royal wealth of metaphor. He always loved the high figurative fashion, and in his early writing he was sometimes patient with a figure, elaborating it with care, to make it go upon all fours. So Thurio, in *The Two Gentlemen*, explains to Proteus, by a simile taken from the spinning of flax, how Silvia's love may be transferred from Valentine to himself:

> Therefore, as you unwind her love from him,
> Lest it should ravel, and be good to none,

You must provide to bottom it on me:
Which must be done by praising me as much
As you in worth dispraise Sir Valentine.

When a figure is thus carefully worked out in detail, it becomes cold and conceited: things are not so like one another as to be fitted in all their parts, and the process of fitting them takes the attention away from the fact to be illustrated, which would remain significant, even if the world furnished no comparison for it. Something of this chill mars the speeches of Arthur, in *King John*, when he pleads with Hubert for his life. The fire, he says, is dead with grief:

There is no malice in this burning coal;
The breath of heaven hath blown his spirit out,
And strew'd repentant ashes on his head.

When Hubert offers to revive it, Arthur continues:

And if you do, you will but make it blush,
And glow with shame of your proceedings, Hubert;
Nay, it perchance will sparkle in your eyes;
And, like a dog that is compell'd to fight,
Snatch at his master that doth tarre him on.

In Shakespeare's mature work elaborated figures of this kind do not occur. His thought presses on from metaphor to metaphor, any one of them more than good enough for a workaday poet; he strings them together, and passes them rapidly before the eye, each of them bringing its glint of colour and suggestion. His so-called mixed metaphors are not mixed, but successive; the sense of mixture is produced by a rapidity of thought in the writer which baffles the slower reader, and buries him under the missiles that he fails to catch. There are often two or three metaphors in a single

sentence. When Iago recommends Roderigo to wear a false beard, he does it in these words:

> Defeat thy favour with an usurp'd beard.

When Lady Macbeth reproaches Macbeth for his inconstant mind, her scorn condenses itself in what seems to be, but is not, a mixture of metaphor:

> Was the hope drunk
> Wherein you drest yourself?

When *Antony's friends* desert him, his thoughts run through many comparisons:

> All come to this? The hearts
> That pannelled me at heels, to whom I gave
> [illegible]
> .
> . . .

If they had understood the workings of Shakespeare's imagination, his later editors would not have attempted to amend his figures by reducing them to a dull symmetry. When Macbeth says,

> My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf.

he speaks like Shakespeare. Those who read "my May of life" make him speak like Pope. An even more prosy emendation has been allowed, in many editions, to ruin one of the finest of Cleopatra's speeches:

> 'Tis paltry to be Caesar:
> Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
> A minister of her will. and it is great
> To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
> Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
> Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
> The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's.

The substitution of "dug" for "dung" robs the poet of his sudden vision of the whole earth nourishing the race of man on its own corruption and decay, and robs him without compensation.

Accustomed as he is to deal with concrete reality and live movement, Shakespeare seems to do his very thinking in metaphor. He is generally careful to make his metaphors appropriate to the speaker of them; and his highest reaches of imagination are often seen in a single figure. What a wonderful vitality and beauty the word "ride" gives to his description of Beatrice:

> Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes.

No other speech gives us so horrible a glimpse into the pit of Iago's soul as his own speech of reassurance to Roderigo, with its summer gardening lore:

> Dost not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee,
> And thou by that small hurt hast cashier'd Cassio:
> Though other things grow fair against the sun,
> Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe:
> Content thyself awhile.

The vivid pictorial quality of Shakespeare's imagination causes him to be dissatisfied with all forms of expression which are colourless and abstract. He makes sonorous use of the Latin vocabulary to expound and define his meaning; and then he adds the more homely figurative word to convert all the rest into picture. His words are often paired in this fashion; one gives the thought, the other adds the image. So he speaks of "the catastrophe and heel of pastime"; the "snuff and loathed part of Nature"; "the descent and dust below thy foot"; "the force and road of casualty"; "a puff'd and reckless libertine"; "a malignant and a turban'd Turk." It is this sort of writing that was

in Gray's mind when he said, "Every word in him is a picture."

The very qualities which have made Shakespeare impossible as a teacher have also made him the wonder of the world. He breaks through grammar only to get nearer to the heart of things. The human mind is without doubt a very complicated mystery, alive in all its fibres, incalculable in many of its processes. How should it express itself in grammatical sentences, which are a creaking contrivance, made up of two parts, a subject and a predicate? Yet it dares the attempt; and Shakespeare by his freedom, and spontaneity, and resource, has succeeded, perhaps better than any other writer, in giving a voice and a body to those elusive movements of thought and feeling which are the life of humanity.

These questions of style and grammar have been allowed, perhaps too easily, to intrude upon a greater theme. It is time to return to Shakespeare, and to make an end.

The Tempest was probably his last play—in this sense, at least, that he designed it for his farewell to the stage. The thought which occurs at once to almost every reader of the play, that Prospero resembles Shakespeare himself, can hardly have been absent from the mind of the author. By his most potent art he had bedimmed the noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, and plucked up the giant trees of the forest. Graves at his command had waked their sleepers, oped, and let them forth. When at last he resolved to break the wand of his incantations and to bury his magic book, he was shaken, as all men in sight of the end are shaken, by the passion of mortality. But there was no bitterness in the leave-taking. He looked into the future, and

there was given to him a last vision; not the futile panorama of industrial progress, but a view of the whole world, shifting like a dream, and melting into vapour like a cloud. His own fate and the fate of his book were as nothing against that wide expanse. What was it to him that for a certain term of years men should read what he had written? The old braggart promises of the days of his vanity could not console him now.

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.

So he had written in the Sonnets. When the end drew near, his care was only to forgive his enemies, and to comfort the young, who are awed and disquieted by the show of grief in their elders. Miranda and Ferdinand watch Prospero, as he struggles in the throes of imagination. Then he comes to himself and speaks:

> You do look, my son, in a mov'd sort
> As if you were dismay'd. Be cheerful, sir;
> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a rack behind: we are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

In all the work of Shakespeare there is nothing more like himself than those quiet words of parting—"Be cheerful, sir; our revels now are ended."

Yet they are not ended; and the generations who have come after him, and have read his book, and have

loved him with an inalterable personal affection, must each, as they pass the way that he went, pay him their tribute of praise. His living brood have survived him, to be the companions and friends of men and women as yet unborn. His monument is still a feasting presence, full of light. When he was alive he may sometimes have smiled to think that the phantoms dancing in his brain were as real to him as the sights and sounds of the outer world. The population of that delicate shadowland seemed to have but a frail hold on existence. The one was taken, and the other left; this character served for a play, that phrase or sentence fitted a speech; the others died in their cradles, or lived a moment upon the air, and were dissolved. Those that found acceptance were made over to the tender mercies of the players, for a week's entertainment of the populace. But now three centuries have passed since *King Lear* was written; and we begin to rub our eyes, and wonder. "Change places, and, handy-dandy, which is the ghost, which is the man?" Is the real man to be sought in that fragmentary story of Stratford and London, which, do what we will to revive it, has long ago grown faint as the memory of a last year's carouse? That short and troubled time of his passage, during which he was hurried onward at an ever-increasing pace, blown upon by hopes and fears, cast down and uplifted, has gone like a dream, and has taken him bodily along with it. But his work remains. He wove upon the roaring loom of Time the garment that we see him by; and the earth at Stratford closed over the broken shuttle

INDEX